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# Esther Duflo picks apart the Indian education system

IPA Affiliates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo attended Tehelka-Newsweek's Thinkfest, a festival offering "the opportunity to interact and debate with the foremost thinkers and innovators from India, Pakistan, USA, Britain, China, Israel, the Middle East and Europe."

The Times of India summarizes:

A session at Thinkfest on 'why Indian schools are failing our children' turned out to be strong critique on the present education system in India.

**Abhijit Banerjee**, the Ford Foundation International professor of economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology felt the Right To Education (RTE) Act was how someone 'elite' in Delhi thinks of helping the poor.

"The whole bill reads like a building catalogue," said Banerjee. He felt the rigid requirements of the RTE would lead to many smaller educational institutes operating without proper infrastructure but still providing education to many having to shut down as a result of "falling foul of RTE. The students will then be herded back to these (government schools that have proper classrooms, a playground... but no teachers."

He also faulted parents for their approach to their children's education.

"Very early parents decide the purpose of education is to get to Class XII and get a job," Banerjee said.

French economist **Esther Duflo**, attributed the lack of resolve among a majority of teachers in government schools to the unclear way the mission is defined. "So many students go to school, but at the end of five years they cannot read," Duflo said. She lamented that lower class teachers affect discrimination in grading lower caste students out of conviction that the upper caste students are better. "They believe the lower caste children can't do it. Then the students themselves believe they can't do it and then they really can't do it," she added.

Broaching the subject of testing, Banerjee said "Testing is important because semi-literate parents have the choice between government and private schools

and there has to be a criterion on which they can base their choices."

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