

# 50 Leaders Re-defining Indian Education



Although its child population is India's most abundant factor endowment — 450 million Indians are below 18 years of age — bafflingly, development of this high-potential resource pool is a low priority of the Central and state governments, and indeed all political parties. Even within the great Indian middle class and Indian industry — which is experiencing unprecedented wage inflation, talent crunch and high training costs — there is insufficient awareness of the vital importance of quality primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary education for all of India's children and youth. The percentage of

GDP expended annually (Centre plus states) for education has never crossed the 4 percent threshold and currently hovers around 3.5 percent against the global average of 5 percent and the 6-7 percent expended in developed countries.

According to *EducationWorld* estimates, 160 million children countrywide who should be in school, are not. Little wonder that only 9 percent of the 18-24 age group cohort enter institutions of higher education and even of them more than 75 percent of graduates are unemployable, and require intensive training within firms and companies before they become industry-ready.

For nine years *EducationWorld* has been ploughing a lonely furrow highlighting the grim state of Indian education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. In the process we have had to confront a society and entire communities within it, in denial of this on-the-ground reality of massive, unprecedented, wastage of human capital. Nevertheless during the nine years of uninterrupted publishing and relentless focus on the shame, scandals and few triumphs of Indian education, we have acquired domain knowledge and discovered numerous enlightened individuals who have been working largely unsung, towards developing the nation's abundant human resource.

In this special commemorative Ninth Anniversary issue of *EducationWorld* we profile 50 influential education leaders and champions who in our opinion are helping to transform and re-define (not invariably for the better) Indian education. Although this list was compiled after careful deliberation and nationwide consultation with eminent social scientists and educationists, it's illustrative, not exhaustive.

## Vocational education crusader

**KRISHAN KHANNA**, founder chairman *i Watch* Trust, Mumbai and chairman of i2k Solutions, Mumbai. An indefatigable champion of vocational education for over a decade, in 1993 Khanna threw up a promising corporate career to start *i Watch*, a not-for-profit charitable trust to promote vocational education for school leavers and dropouts. Indeed this mechanical engineering graduate of IIT-Kharagpur is the unsung hero of Indian education's belated swing towards vocational learning. In the Union budget 2007-08, an unprecedented Rs.750 crore was provided by finance minister P. Chidambaram for renovating and modernizing the country's 300 (out of 5,445) government-promoted Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). Moreover in the latest Union budget the finance minister made another handsome provision of Rs.1,500 crore for the establishment of 500 Skill Development Centres countrywide under the public-private partnership model.



Knowledgeable monitors of the education scene in India attribute this swing in official perception towards vocational education (currently only 3-4 percent of Indian school leavers opt for vocational stream education cf. 70-85 percent in Germany) to Khanna's tireless crusade for generous provision of vocational training opportunities as the answer to the country's huge shortage of skilled technicians, and massive pool of educated unemployed. For 16 years, Khanna has been publishing the *i Watch* trust's book titled "*Transforming INDIA through Relevant Education & Vocational Training*". See [www.wakeupcall.org](http://www.wakeupcall.org) for free download.. China has 500,000 VET centres, Japan about 150,000, Germany about 100,000 centres. We have a long way to go.

Khanna was appointed in 2007 on the Prime Minister's Committee on Employment & Vocational Training in the Planning Commission. In 2008 he was appointed as the CII Chairman on the Task Force for Vocational Training. During 2005 to 2010 he was on number of committees on education & training in the MHRD, IGNOU, AICTE, CII, FICCI, Ministry of Communications & PHD&CCI.