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# Why Kids Are Dropping Out of School and What Works in Education – Podcast with Karthik Muralidharan

8/18/15 | [Rajesh Mirchandani](#)CGD Podcast | [Education, education reform](#)[Leave a comment](#)

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India is a great example of what not to do, suggests Professor Karthik Muralidharan of the University of California, San Diego, a leading researcher on what works – and what does not work – in education in developing countries.

Seems strange when you consider Indians head up some of the biggest companies on the planet, including [Google](#), Microsoft and Pepsi. But Muralidharan says these high achievers show up the weaknesses in India's education system.

"The history of education in developing countries has not been about how to educate whole populations but how to channel those who are smart," he told me in a CGD Podcast, recorded earlier this year.

The result is that many students stay in school for only a short time.

"[Kids] are dropping out not because they don't want an education. They're dropping out because they're learning nothing," he says starkly.

Muralidharan's work, and that of other researchers, finds many problems with the received wisdom of how to improve levels of learning among schoolchildren. Smaller class sizes? Fail. Buy more textbooks? Fail. Hire more teachers, train them better, pay them more? Fail, fail, fail.

CGD is working in this area too, with Senior Fellows Lant Pritchett and Justin Sandefur taking a lead role on the [RISE program](#) to measure the quality of education in developing countries.

So, what *does* work? Watch the clip of our podcast below to hear Muralidharan's one key piece of advice for policymakers. Or you can check out the full video [here](#).



Muralidharan doesn't seem too downcast about education. The Millennium Development Goals have seen a lot of progress in education in developing countries, he tells me. But the measurable outcomes of the MDGs – such as getting more children into school – have not been reflected in actual improvements in what children are learning.

"The default of putting more resources into schools is not working because the two key ingredients are missing: pedagogy and governance," he says, by which he means how the resources pumped into schools are actually being used, and how education systems are held accountable and rewarded for performance.

From these principles, Muralidharan offers some rules of thumb:

- Textbooks are usually written by elites and only benefit the best students,
- Extra teaching for struggling students works if you throw away the textbook and focus on where the child is at, and
- Teachers need to feel rewarded for good work in helping students improve.

Muralidharan does have positive comments about de-worming, the subject of the recent #wormwars social media frenzy, which CGD wrote about [here](#). He describes it as small-scale with big impact – some good news in the otherwise checkered landscape of education interventions.

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