




seeds of change

teachers' experiences in education



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Foreword

What the teacher is, is more important than what he teaches.” - Karl Menninger

Educators who believe in this ideology are the contributors to this collection of writings. Each of them has had some unique experience in education. All of them have discovered their own space to grow, learn and nurture in the course of their lives in the classrooms, and sometimes, outside it.

At Pravah, we have been closely associating with teachers for a very long time through our interventions in schools, the Teachers Resource Centre, and the Educators Collective. Our various associations have strengthened our belief that the educator’s journey is as important as that of the student’s.

Hence, it gives us great pleasure to share with you this publication, which traces the journeys of teachers towards becoming reflective practitioners through capturing their personal experiences and encounters with education - be it trying out new methods in the classroom, being inspired by a student, breaking out of their everyday routines, or meeting eminent educators. From beginning to end, their individual personalities have influenced their learning processes and given shape to the ultimate outcome, thereby infusing life into the transaction that teaching-learning really is.

We celebrate the learning spirit of educators.

Students Bring "Right to Information" into Action

APRAJITA RALLI

BLUEBELLS SCHOOL INTERNATIONAL, NEW DELHI

In an idealist stance, knowledge must be manifested in the actions of knowledge seekers. This is what manoeuvred the minds of teachers and students vis-a-vis right to information.

Responding with alacrity to the idea of incorporating Right to Information Act in the school curriculum in an article "**Plan to include RTI Act in school syllabus**", dated 12th October 2006 in the 'Hindu', the team of students and teachers wrote to the Chief Minister of Delhi briefing about the revolutionary actions it had already undertaken toward RTI.

Here is a small but wonderful saga of students becoming activists by bringing a connection between knowledge and action.

Beginning by the young Beginners

Students from ninth standard began to research on the Right to Information. In their lessons on Democracy it became a quintessential point to understand the power of "We the people". Enlightened by readings, students decided to do projects on the issue pertaining to RTI. The young researchers exhibited their capability to connect the text to their context. The findings of the project work were showcased at other schools. While other schools reflected on issues such as child labour, gender discrimination, obesity, drug abuse, etc., students from Bluebells set the trail ablaze by emphasising the RTI.

The sense of social responsibility associated with knowledge injected a desire to enact their knowledge. The new RTI Act, furthermore, encouraged them to start a venture whereby knowledge seekers could make a difference in their immediate society using the Act as a tool. A group of students from the same class decided to bring their knowledge into action. The group found an expression of their motive in identifying Awaaz the Voice as the title, for the forum which is dedicated to the cause of RTI. The manifesto of the group promises not only to disseminate awareness related to RTI but also to take action on concerned issues in its capacity.

Awaaz and its endeavours

On 14th August, 2006 Awaaz launched a school-community interaction programme whereby students went to the neighbourhood area campaigning for transparency in file-noting. It was amazing to find that students from Bluebells were first to make their presence felt in this revolutionary direction. Awaaz is in close contact with the NGO Parivartan, supported by Arwind Kejriwal, the Raman Magsaysay award winner for the year 2006.

In the series of research based action, members of Awaaz discovered that their school is flanked by a women's college on one side and a motor repair shop on the other, causing traffic irregularities in the school area. School buses and teachers were issued challans (fined) by the traffic police for parking outside school while retailers and vendors who cause congestion on the roadside went free. Awaaz filed an RTI application and lodged a complaint in this regard with the traffic police of Delhi. The results came within a month from the Traffic Police department and the congestion is now relatively under control. The efforts of Awaaz were lauded as noble initiative by the students of Bluebells, in a coverage by CNN-IBN during the RTI awareness week.

Armed with the connection between knowledge and action, students of Bluebells and activist members of Awaaz decided to use dramatics as a tool to create awareness. During the school fete in the month of December 2006, members of Awaaz put up a street play "Haq Hai Mera", meaning it is my right, depicting the fundamental right of humans to question and press authority for answers. The play conveyed a message to all and sundry that right to information has to be practiced and respected in every domain of everyday life. To sustain democracy at macro level of state, every citizen needed to heed right to information at home in the first place.

Ever since its inception, Awaaz has been issuing pamphlets whereby creative expressions of young activists convey a profound message: 'We the People' are not meant to be mere voters and mute spectators. We can bring about a change if we wish, and for that we need to actualise the potential power of knowledge.

A Meet with Rohit Dhankar

ANITA CHOWDHARY
CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL, NEW DELHI

There is always a gratification in hearing someone talk who is in the same league as you. Who has had similar experiences and has walked a similar path in life. However, the one thing that makes them different from the rest can be very motivating and many a times reassuring for the others'.

Anita Chowdhary from Cambridge School recounts her experiences with the expert educators at the Teachers' Learning Conference: Schools That Care meet in Bangalore.

Excerpts from the meeting with Rohit Dhankar.

Anita: How does your school reflect the objectives of education?

Rohit: Education is a social construction and mirrors the society we live in. A democratic society is where there is equality and freedom and one that prepares its citizens to think and act on their own. Pedagogically, we represent an approach that emphasises learning with understanding and the learner's active participation in constructing knowledge. Three things to keep in mind for children will be: '*Anyaye na sahe, Anyaye na kare, Anyaye ke bare me baat kare*'

This is done in Digantar by constant dialogue where children can communicate freely without fear. Every learning principle in the school is adopted with a lot of thought and deliberation.

Anita: Please elaborate on “learning with understanding”?

Rohit: We reject any use of force or compulsion to ensure school participation, equally strong is our rejection of mechanical transfer of skills or rote learning.

Anita: What are your views on rote learning?

Rohit: Rote learning is of no good. If a child gets habituated by rote learning, it impacts the clarity of his mind and impairs critical thinking. Rote learning is a barrier in the understanding of concepts critical for self propelling learning process. Also, there are certain things like alphabets which entail no understanding. We had a student who had learnt entire passages from the Quran and her parents held a celebration for this achievement. When I asked her to explain a few lines, her answer was, “Does Quran have a meaning?” Even her parents were not convinced that there was any need to understand the meaning of those verses.

Anita: Your views on cooperation vs. competition?

Rohit: The pedagogy which we have adopted emphasises on cooperation rather than competition. The thrill of mastering a concept or skill is the motivating factor rather than fear

of punishment and examination. It is based on encouraging and affectionate teacher-child relationship. There is no use of fear in Digantar, neither to control behaviour nor to “encourage” learning.

Anita: “Caring schools” is the theme of the conference we are attending in Bangalore. How are you able to develop this bond in Digantar?

Rohit: All new teachers in our school undergo a four month training programme. The first step is to build trust and we do it through certain exercises. This brings in a feeling of belongingness and the teachers realise that the profession is rewarding once they get the unconditional love of the children.

The next step is to send the teacher to school and watch the other teachers. They write notes which are critiqued in the evening and debated upon. Next, the trainee helps the teacher and the final stage is when the trainee takes the class and the teacher critiques it. This process transforms the relationship between the teacher and the taught and it becomes one of affection.

What have I taken back from the sessions?

- **My life is my message**

- **From the known to the unknown:**

As a teacher I must give examples from the immediate environment of the child for a deeper understanding.

- **Any moment can be a learning moment:**

We are all faced with a culture of violence as the morning newspapers are replete with incidents of violence. We cannot protect children all the time but we can teach them to reflect upon it and draw lessons of self reliance.

- **Open space is a caring space**

Sometimes we teachers tend to be too demanding, judgemental and intrusive. This results in children withdrawing into themselves or becoming vulnerable to fear or feel a sense of powerlessness. We consciously need to provide them open spaces in schools for individual learning.

- **Look within**

I need to be a reflective practitioner.

Reflections on Learning Session with Jane Sahi

ANJALI SHARMA

RAMJAS SCHOOL, DAY BOARDING, ANAND PARBAT, NEW DELHI

Jane Sahi is Peace Educator and teaches language paper at TISS.

On the first day we landed at Bangalore Swati introduced us to her teacher Ms Jane Sahi. Her beautiful wrinkles and her glowing humility touched my heart. I knew for certain that sometimes appearances are not simply appearances, they are reality. For once Shakespeare was wrong.

She was asked to speak on safety and she pointed that the topic surely has a negative connotation to it. Since somewhere we want to always keep the child insulated from danger by being overprotective. She insisted that we must not be paralysed due to risk and children should be made self reliant. In the village where she teaches children walk through the jungle filled with unknown dangers. They learn by themselves how to avoid snakes and deal with other such situations they come across. She clarified that adults need not expose children to reckless dangers or be overprotective too but should work towards bringing out the ambivalence that hides the facts.

She also talked about a city school where children in a gym were doing the same exercises which allowed no falling and hence no risk; however, no risk means no growth.

She expressed her concern over violence in school, in the society, country and the world at large. "We can't pretend to the children that these things do not exist and on the other hand, also teach them that they can make a difference."

Schools can be healing spaces, a bridge between life experiences and what could be 'the grandest thing to do in learning and living is mastering one's scary ideas'. She recollected that once the teachers of her institute were shown the movie 'Silent Water', where the protagonist commits suicide. Her staff remarked, 'what else could she do'. This deeply hurt her as she felt 'there is always another option in life' and suicide or violence should never be an option.

The world is full of harsh realities and we must convey this to the children along with our sense of hope or even the lack of it. Many a times we can't steer children from the stark realities, like death. But we should be assured that children have a knack of interweaving life and death and therefore pain should not be excluded from their awareness.

Jane Sahi also talked about her childhood experiences which are etched in her memory and personality. The story of Mahatma Gandhi by Louis Fischer inspired her to come to India and realise the courage of Indians. She also said her parents took her on anti-war marches which shaped her love for peace.

About dealing with children she said it's important to respect a child's privacy and that it is also important to be nonjudgmental. Therefore we must empathise with the students as far as possible and we should respect the differences among children.

She narrated an incident which I found very profound. In her class of creative writing, she had strewn objects and asked the children to write on it. One boy who had weak eyesight wrote about a cow which wore glasses and how the other animals laughed at it. When she read the story she knew the child was the cow.

About her teachings, she said we should show them different options, otherwise they stay put at one place. We have to make small but significant moves to make them move and when we fail in our struggles with children we should try to see if we have to address something within us. And this resolution is endless.

I thank Jane Sahi for her profundity and intensity.

The Idea of Holistic Education and Misplaced SUPW

DEV N PATHAK, BLUEBELLS SCHOOL INTERNATIONAL, NEW DELHI

In *Nai Talim*, M K Gandhi shows us an alternative to the system of education that allegedly enslaves and disables us. Our mainstream education system, a borrowed model from the colonial power, instills in us knowledge that distances us from our nature and disengages us from our everyday world, typically Macaulay's model. Hence, *Nai Talim*, literally meaning, 'new education' incorporates all those activities, close to everyday life, as means of our education. Skill based learning is, arguably a persuasive antithesis to the dry and book-based system of learning and teaching, thus the dictum.

The Gandhian idea of skill-based education reflects in the design of 'Socially useful productive work' (SUPW). In several commissions on education, we discover an urge to make education closer to everyday lives of learners. Thereby, the idea of holistic education for our children assumed significance. The National Curriculum Framework 2005 makes it even more pronounced as it lays down milestones of faith in the skills of learners. Our schools have been endeavouring to implement the ideal design. Problem, however, arises from the fact that there is a huge gap between theory and practice as far as allowing SUPW to become a tool for enduring learning is concerned. As a teacher who teaches both SUPW and a subject from Social Science, I perceive a two fold problem in the way SUPW is perceived in schools. Either it is treated as secondary in academics, which is worth no attention; or it is taught without establishing a needed connection with mainstream academics. We perceive mainstream academics to be a prerogative of those teachers who prepare students for exams by making them memorise answers. Thereby, textbooks become the bible of mainstream education and teachers who are confined to these books are 'priests' beyond any questioning. SUPW, in this scheme, is reduced to a secondary status. The prejudiced stance makes it less '*academically useful productive work (AUPW)*', let alone socially useful productive work. It is imperative therefore, to have SUPW manifesting features of AUPW too, unless we are ready to enjoy reduction of SUPW into a mere respite from routine academics.

The degree of problem varies from school to school and place to place. In a state run school in Bihar, SUPW means buying broomsticks at the end of the year and submitting it to the concerned teacher and getting easy marks, which will be added in report card/mark sheet. The secondary status of SUPW in small towns is present in state run schools of Delhi too. Thankfully, in some private schools in Delhi SUPW is a big attraction. Many schools have separate departments for art and craft, dramatics, debating, pottery, photography, music, dance, multimedia and film-making. We experience every year a huge group of students opting for one or another. The status of SUPW in privately run schools in Delhi and elsewhere

too, is certainly commendable given the articles students put up at the end of the year. Notwithstanding, an antagonistic relationship between mainstream academics and SUPW, preventing the latter from becoming AUPW is quite explicit. Hence, if we ask the smartest students to create a discourse on their works they have done using their skills, they tend to fumble. Every year students organise a fete to sell out their works they have rigorously produced. More often than not, we find academic sobriety and an ideal tendency to offer the world an alternative model. On the occasion of film-making competitions we find students emulating styles of commercial cinema and tend to make spoofs rather than offering a fresh and innovative vision. The lack of confidence vis-a-vis ideas is but a marker of weak/no relation with textual learning. We find young debaters either reproducing a great argument of a dead visionary or having no insights other than prejudices. Both disclose a dormant spirit of thinking in our youngsters. Ask them to create a play on the basis of a lesson they have learnt and they flunk unless they are tutored. It is a bane if students can not derive theory/knowledge/insights from their works of art which they passionately produce by using their skills. How can a work be socially useful if it is not academically useful in the first place? Academic utility is characterised by the potential to create a discourse. I am afraid, even teachers do not know as to why they are doing any particular activity, let alone students. On the occasion of a fete in school, if students are asked as to why they have a fete, they point to 'fun' as a driving factor. Teachers either recapitulate what students hold out or reproduce the clichéd ideas. I find it disheartening that we do not have a tendency to take our activities in the realm of academics for granted, and we tend to do them mindlessly rather than with an enlightened mind. Thereby, SUPW becomes a mere break from Academics for both students and teacher. Influenced by such a moot point we all tend to strike a relationship between the two. We all in academic space, in school, colleges and university must understand that everything we do has a meaning, and that meaning has to be interpreted in academic spirit. Fortunately, new NCERT books offer such space for learners and teachers wherein SUPW and AUPW gel well.

It is indeed the need of the hour to devise our curriculum in such a manner that SUPW and AUPW are placed in juxtaposition, horizontally rather than vertically. The symbiosis between the two is in the interest of holistic education of learners. Moreover, it provides with a bridge between text and context, making the process of teaching and learning smoother and more fascinating. Certainly, such education will have emancipatory bearing upon us.

आशा की किरण

किरण लखनपाल
आर्मी पब्लिक स्कूल, नोएडा

धन की लोलुपता ही तो है,
जिसने उजाड़ा घर संसार है।
किसी का सब उजाड़ने से,
क्या कभी बसा अपना घर-संसार है।

राष्ट्र-भक्ति को छोड़कर
अपनो से नाता तोड़कर
जकड़ा है उनको जाकर,
जो काम करते हैं, झूठी कसमें खाकर।
जो करते हैं इनका प्रयोग
उनकी मानसिकता को कर कमज़ोर।

क्या घृणा, द्वेष मन में भरना आवश्यक है?
क्या प्रेम भाव से होने वाले सभी काम निरर्थक हैं?
समाज के समक्ष प्रश्न बड़ा है भारी।
इन सबसे होने वाले कुकर्मों की किस पर है जिम्मेदारी?
क्या सभी मौन, यूँ ही देखते रहेंगे?
या कुछ पल चलकर विरोध भी प्रकट करेंगे।

किसी का मन तो बदलेगा,
सौ में से एक तो सुधरेगा।
कौन समझाए इन विनाश चाहने वालों को,
जीवन की मधुरता को समाप्त करने वालों को?

कि शांति ही सबसे बड़ा अस्त्र है,
जो देता सब को सुख और मन को करता मस्त है।

Making of a Teacher

LATIKA GUPTA

WHEN I saw my name in the list of candidates selected for admission in the B.El.Ed. programme, I did not feel any sense of achievement, in part because I had no desire to become a school teacher. I detested the idea because I felt I was destined for something better. I had seen my school teachers rather closely because my mother taught in the same school. They looked too insignificant for me to aspire to become like them, incapable of offering the challenging vistas of life which I desired at that time. I thought of them as very lowly kind of professionals as compared to doctors, lawyers and especially the army officers I interacted with.

The staff room was for me an easily accessible place. Almost every visit to that room left behind an unpleasant memory; my teachers' discussions appeared rather common place. Socially and economically, most of them came across as narrow minded and insecure people who practised caste-based untouchability at home and gave tuitions to students to earn extra money. That a teacher's salary is not enough to sustain a family was one of the most discussed topics at my home. With such a sordid impression of school teaching, I felt cheated that my parents ignored my real potential and forced me to accept a teaching career as my fate.

By the end of twelve years of schooling in a few Kendriya Vidyalayas spread across the country, I had become a directionless adolescent whose performance had gone down to the minimum marks. The load of non-comprehension in all the science subjects of Classes XI and XII along with mathematics, and the failure to satisfy the parental expectation of a seat in a medical college had completely crushed my confidence. My school teachers only taught question-answers in the class to prepare me for the board exams. They made absolutely no attempt to engage me or other students in developing concepts or understanding processes in science subjects.

The school setting offered no answers to my curiosity about different areas of knowledge and as a result I gradually lost all interest and ability to choose any career option. I spent hours in the class wondering why we needed to learn about the periodic-table in chemistry. Though a very confident student till Class X, by the beginning of Class XII I had begun to feel nervous even while talking to my classmates who could score high marks by rote memorizing the answers in all the subjects, including physics and mathematics. I tried mugging up answers several times but never succeeded and thus felt even more frustrated.

This deterioration in my school performance and declining confidence led my parents to conclude that I was suitable only for a teacher's job. In addition, teaching was seen as a 'safe' job for women as it involved only half a day's work. When I showed reluctance to join B.El.Ed., my parents made my life miserable, repeatedly telling me that I wouldn't get admission to any

other course and that I was very late *in life* as all my classmates had already secured admission to various programmes. My parents stopped talking to me till I agreed. I was so unhappy about joining a teacher-training programme that even the achievement of clearing an entrance exam and personal interview was no compensation for the loss I felt of better opportunities.

I was in the first batch of Delhi University's B.El.Ed. programme which started in 1994. People were extremely reluctant to join the programme, apprehensive as the idea of an undergraduate degree programme in elementary education itself was new. It was for the first time that a university had offered a degree programme in elementary education. The only consolation was that the programme had started in a prestigious college of Delhi University.

Most of my other classmates had joined the programme because of similar parental pressure, their families never having allowed them to aspire for any career other than teaching. Even after I joined the programme and started attending class, my anxieties about school teaching as an unexciting work remained intact and in certain ways increased when I noticed a contradiction between the rigour of the B.El.Ed. programme and the money it would fetch in the job market later.

We had to review the entire syllabus of elementary school in the first year of the programme itself, in addition to understanding the psychological, political and sociological constructs of childhood. B.El.Ed. students were the first to enter the college at 8 am and the last to leave at 4 pm in the afternoon. We had to do daily assignments, weekly projects and regular readings. There were no straight question-answers and definitions to memorise; therefore, we had to study and develop our opinion and thoughts on every topic. The teachers' demand to articulate every idea or response in our own words was unusually demanding.

Then there were the ongoing projects which we were expected to research and work on independently. For one such project, I studied silk as a consumer product. No book had any ready answers about silk production and its various uses, social status of producers or the scale of the silk economy. This one project alone took me to three science libraries, the Silk Export Promotion Council, various state emporia and an agriculture institute.

A basic component of the B.El.Ed. programme was to push us to pursue enquiries as *our* enquiries. Throughout the four years of B.El.Ed., not just me but all my classmates wondered why we were made to work so hard to qualify for the meagre salary of a teacher which the students of other teacher training programmes, such as JBT and D.Ed. too would get by investing much less time and work compared to us.

Nevertheless, B.El.Ed. turned out to be the biggest catalyst in my search for an aim and direction in life. Much before the programme taught me about theories of learning and human development, it helped me acquire a sense of self and inner peace, rarely experienced by most students. I recognised my potential strengths and aspirations and got ample opportunities of

unlimited growth. This programme changed *everything* in my life. It provided opportunities for rigorous learning to satisfy my intellectual thirst and to experience what it really means to learn. More than just teacher training, it offered a training of the mind to strengthen my emotional being and to develop interpersonal skills.

The first year of the programme laid the foundation of knowledge any thoughtful teacher might require. There were core courses in which I engaged with the epistemology of every school subject. In the core natural science course, I finally understood that the periodic table helps us to understand the basic nature and rationale of chemical bonding. There were other foundation courses in the four years which helped me to develop an understanding of children and education in the context of socio-political and economic conditions prevailing in different parts of India.

The course on 'Contemporary India' encouraged me to review my childhood in the context of my family's socio-political ethos. It was the first landmark in my identity formation as I realised the links between the Constitution of India and the educational services which I had availed of given my family's location in the class hierarchy, and my socialisation as a citizen of a democratic nation. I started appreciating that there was a variety of childhoods, each one shaped by factors like region, religion, occupation, caste and schooling. This kind of learning enabled me to cultivate a more informed understanding of the process of teaching my future students and my own location in society. I could finally see myself as a change-maker.

With a better grip on the epistemology of different subjects and developmental psychology, I learnt the pedagogic approaches appropriate for these subjects. I also started appreciating that my role as a teacher would be of a person who works like an agent of growth and development, someone who can critically link children's growing up in different kinds of socio-political ethos with big terms like 'national development'. That every school subject approaches the aim of developing a sensitive citizen in its unique manner was a crucial realisation.

The more I developed as a teacher, the more I became aware of the uniqueness of my training as compared to the trainees enrolled in other courses. Interactions with B.Ed., D.Ed. and JBT students revealed that their training did not offer any opportunities for a critical understanding of their occupation and socialisation. My grasp of education as a process which takes place within a socio-political context made me feel that I had a better grasp of teaching. Students doing other programmes did not adequately understand why they teach social sciences or natural sciences to children at any given age.

We were taught to ask critical questions in order to learn whereas in other courses trainees learnt to teach question-answers from guidebooks. They were so absorbed in making thermocol models of the solar system or birds' beaks that they rarely got the space to develop the necessary skills to reflect on serious academic issues such as children's cognitive development and its interface with pedagogic principles in different subjects. The topic of

solar system offered the biggest contrast as we had spent two months to learn how primary school children cannot comprehend the complexity of various constructs embedded in this topic and that at best we can encourage little children to wonder about the sky, stars and the moon. On the other hand, while JBT/D.Ed. students made expensive models of the planets and their axis, they never engaged with the topic itself.

Overcoming the notion that textbooks are the only source of knowledge was a big development. I saw it as a major break from my past because my school teachers had only taught the textbook content to enable me to answer the given questions. My contemporaries in other teacher-training programmes were also trained to teach the prescribed textbook. There were practicum courses in all the four years of B.El.Ed. in which we interacted with school children on a variety of themes. We observed children while playing or learning in the class; we did psychological tasks with them and organised other activities like storytelling and theatrical games, before finally teaching them in the fourth year.

Whenever I went to a school, I interacted with the students of other teacher training programmes. At an initial stage of the training itself, I found it difficult to converse with them as I felt their discourse was much too narrow and trivial, limited essentially to the teacher's presentability, issues of reward and punishment, and motivation as the locus of a teacher's role in students' learning. For me, the real lesson was how to become a resourceful teacher who sees every activity or assignment as a meaningful experience which has links with the child's life outside the school and relevance for it. It meant accepting oneself as a thoughtful person who is capable of making choices and knows what it means to nurture young people's educational experiences.

This confidence building took a decisively explicit form in the course on 'Human Relations and Communication' and in self-development workshops in the second year of the programme. These courses demanded that I reflect on myself and my experiences with the help of theoretical constructs on identity. They first made me aware of various stereotypes and then conscious about how I had internalised them. These workshops made a deep impact on my personality, helping me to evolve as a more secular and tolerant person. Above all, I learnt to aspire as a teacher, to take pride in myself after overcoming the grip of my own socialisation which had made me accept the given and obey familial and societal rules.

These developments helped me overcome the inhibitions and fears which I had internalised during childhood and adolescence. I started to see myself in a leadership role as a teacher. The struggle was two fold. It meant challenging the settled perceptions and attitudes about the kind of woman that my family wanted me to become one who would do a half-day job to earn a supplementary salary for the household and bring up children in a smarter way as compared to a non-working woman all this without challenging any established norms of labour division in the family. The second was to accept myself as a teacher who could access

resources other than the textbook and blackboard, as being free to look for new pedagogic resources for children.

The practicum courses which gave adequate space to creatively try out new teaching-learning material, further consolidated my confidence as a teacher. I matured from being a college student into becoming a teacher who was concerned about issues like the wide range in children's learning levels in class, their response to activities, stories, poems and other material, the depth of content knowledge required for planning daily lessons and, above all, linking this with larger curricular aims.

My B.El.Ed. training ingrained in me the need to plan before teaching, while leaving sufficient space for flexibility, as also to reflect on students' responses and one's own observations while teaching. All this formed a complex web of subject content, learning theories, children's development and the teacher's role, which together provided a sense of direction to every activity that I did with children during school internship and later.

Even the routine task of returning notebooks to children after examining their work provided opportunities for creative interaction, since for this task I chose those children who hadn't learnt to read well even after reaching Class IV. When such students asked others to help them recognise whose notebook it was and then focused on the name-chit to see how a particular name was written, one could sense a perceptible improvement in their reading ability.

In addition to the rigour of academic training, the programme provided an opportunity to organise outstation trips, visit museums, organise seminars and exhibitions which trained us in decision-making, risk calculation, which helped sharpen our organisational skills. For instance, in the third year of the programme, we went on outstation trips to study innovative educational programmes run by non-government organisations in different parts of India. For the first time I booked a train ticket on my own for the journey. It involved locating the reservation counter at the railway station, learning how to fill a form to reserve a sleeper berth in a train, and then to find the counter where concessional tickets are issued, all of which provided a great thrill. It took six trips between my college and the railway station over three days. It gave me the confidence to travel on my own.

I went to Pune to study the pedagogic interaction between teachers and students at a progressive school called Aksharnandan. Class VI students of the school had taken a loan from a nearby bank to organise a *bal mela*. They made handicraft items which were sold at the mela. After the mela, the students sat down with their mathematics teacher to calculate if they had made any money from the sale. The students had been told that they would have to return more money to the bank than they had borrowed, which would be the bank's profit. In precisely an hour all of them had learnt the toughest concepts of primary level mathematics profit, loss and interest.

The students learnt all these calculations in a real life context and along with them I learnt the meaning of making every educational experience a real experience for both the teacher and learner. I saw several such activities in Aksharnandan during my week-long stay, excellent examples of Gandhi's idea of education as work experience and Dewey's ideas on education as an experience which had an immediate purpose and meaning.

It is with informed viewpoints and such field-based experiences that I entered the four-month school internship in the final year of B.El.Ed. I taught Class IV children in a municipal corporation school, a group of 72 girls in the age range of eight to fourteen years whose learning levels were equally diverse in different subjects. It is in those four months that my identity as a resourceful teacher fully crystallised as I planned and collected resources for each and every topic which I taught.

In teaching my students about the different states of India, I presented a large collection of tourist brochures developed by travel agencies and state governments. I divided the students in groups based on where their parents or grandparents came from. Every student had to read the brochures of both their own state and another one given to their group. As they read the text and observed the pictures, it helped them relate the material to their own experiences. Even children who had not yet learnt to read and write felt compelled to look at it with some help, because the brochures were colourful and interesting and the matter was about their hometown.

When teaching them how to write letters, I gave them an actual purpose. They had to write to a classmate or to one of my teachers who lived in Bangalore. I gave them real inland letter cards to write on. We discussed the format and content of both the letters which they copied from the blackboard and added more ideas and drew pictures. Next day, we all went to a nearby post office to post the letters.

There was great excitement the following fortnight as one or the other girl reported receiving her classmate's letter through the post. Their excitement reached a peak when my teacher came from Bangalore with their letters. They were amazed that their letters had travelled to a far off place and that my teacher was genuinely happy to read them. After this experience they wanted to write letters to everybody they knew, and especially me. In the remaining two months of my internship and later I received over a hundred letters from the students.

Let me share another activity. The school toilet was located next to our classroom. Repeated requests to the principal to have it cleaned had not yielded any results. I, therefore, took it up as an appropriate activity in which I played a theatrical game. I drew a toilet on the classroom floor and asked the children to act out what one does inside a toilet. It was indeed funny and amusing. Every child enacted how she used the toilet, and the used space was marked with a chalk. As the floor of the 'imagined' toilet filled up with chalk marks, the remaining girls asked where they could sit as there was no space left for them to use. I forced them to try, to which

they responded by stating that their shoes would get dirty, as would the corridor and the classroom.

There was no need to stress the point because the girls had realized the need to use the toilet properly and keep it clean. We made a list of do's and don'ts for the toilet, using red and blue colour for the areas to be used and not used inside the toilet. The need to use water without wastage sunk in on its own, making it one of the best lessons in toilet training that I have ever given to small children. I must add that the foul smell in our classroom was greatly reduced after this activity.

In 1998 I completed my training in the B.El.Ed. programme. In the decade that has passed since then I have taught in a school, engaged with NGOs in different capacities, taught B.El.Ed. students for three years and worked as a Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) consultant in the NCERT. I have experienced the system of education at various levels both directly and indirectly through my B.El.Ed. students who are now teaching in private as well as government schools. I have travelled to almost all the states of the country for SSA related work, interacting with school teachers, teacher educators, middle-level functionaries and administrators. My interactions with teachers during these state visits and with my students have reinforced an assessment I had made during my adolescence that the job of teaching small children is indeed belittled in our country. The most critical link in the chain of educational services, the teacher, remains the weakest link.

The Government of India has spent billions to achieve the goal of universalisation of elementary education since the early 1990s. The earlier District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) and now Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) reflect the nationwide political and administrative consensus to provide quality education to all children. And we do see changes such as new buildings and toilets, an annual grant of five hundred rupees to teachers to buy teaching-learning material, in-service training organised every year on different subjects, pedagogy, assessment, gender concerns, disability, learning disorders, and so on. Yet, the Indian school remains a depressing place, probably because the most critical player, namely the teacher, is still to find a place in the planners' mind.

The dark and dingy rooms in which the nation trains its teachers in District Institutes for Education and Training (DIETs) are dark, not just in the sense of poor infrastructure but also academically. To begin with, there are no journals of education in any of the Indian languages and the few we have rarely address the concerns of teachers and their trainers. It is like an academic famine of ideas in which DIETs operate; little surprise that the training they provide fails to stimulate any intellectual enquiry.

They continue to be run like a factory which produces hundreds of teachers every year without shaping attitudes and developing their skills. The condition of the DIET staff is no better. The choice of the word 'staff' itself reveals the saddest story of teacher training. My reluctance to call DIET staff as 'faculty' is based on an awareness of the historical deprivation

of resources and insight which is reflective of the reluctance of policy-makers to view teacher educators as faculty members of institutes of higher education.

The development and modernisation of DIETs has yet to become a concern as evident in SSA planning. Although it uses the DIET as a key location for quality improvement, the SSA does not invest in developing its academic and human resources. Equally sordid or worse is the story of parallel private institutions because they do not have to organise in-service training as a mandatory task. The State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) too face a similar predicament. These institutions are several light years behind the pedagogic and theoretical movements taking place in institutions of education in other parts of the world.

The staff of DIETs is the primary workforce which trains teachers in pre- and in-service training programmes. With such a weak foundation, it is hardly surprising that teachers fail to teach basic reading and writing skills to a large number of children over five years of primary education. The rot which goes on in in-service teacher training is like an abscess feeding on neglect of teacher training programmes. I have witnessed hundreds of training in which teachers are not given even one research-based study or article on education to read. In fact, their need to read is not even a part of our discourse.

The system has not allowed the development of teachers as professionals; what makes it worse is using them as freely available and reliable workers for election duties, preparation of muster rolls and distribution of polio drops. Evidently, our democracy is maintained at the cost of children's learning. I have attended several meetings in which high-ranking officials use abusive language for teachers for not ensuring learner achievements which the political fraternity demands. Teacher bashing is a common ploy to get respite from the pressure to improve learner achievement. But nobody admits that the teacher is simply a product of our misdirected educational planning in which planners have forgotten the basic nature of educational enterprise as an enduring activity, deserving a better long-term investment.

Finally, the B.El.Ed. programme has trained me to analyse through the lens of gender-based knowledge. Despite economic development and India's participation in global efforts to educate more children, the teachers' status has been further undermined in terms of social position and professional worth. Yesterdays caring housewife or paid maids have found a new incarnation today as school teachers with a half day engagement in the school. The job of teaching small children which is otherwise glorified as the job of building the future of the nation has been further devalued because it has become increasingly women dominated. With meagre salaries and abysmal service conditions, teachers survive the daily routine by basking in the winter sun and missing school in the summer.

It is in this reality of school education that B.El.Ed. graduates are functioning today. They find themselves as misfits both in the system as well as in society. Their families express constant frustration because they teach passionately, which means they work hard. Their salary is the

same as any other teacher's, with no reward for their special B.El.Ed. training and hard work. Though it is the mandate of our Constitution to develop an integrated elementary school set-up, the country has yet to appreciate the merit of an inclusive schooling experience for the first eight years of education.

B.El.Ed. graduates, who have generally been recognised as exceptionally good teachers in private as well as government schools, are still treated only as 'primary' school (not elementary, i.e. covering Classes I to VIII) teachers entitled to the lowest possible salary. And though they have made their mark in several spheres of curricular reform, including the National Curriculum Framework (2005), Delhi's own state government has not shown any inclination to recognise them as teachers who deserve better treatment and space to march on.

Journey to Schools that Care

(A conference held by The Teacher Foundation in Bangalore on 3rd 5th Nov.)

HEMA LATHA

ANDHRA SCHOOL, PUSHP VIHAR, NEW DELHI

Our journey sponsored by Pravah began on 1st November at 7 in the morning at the Delhi airport. We were a group of 12 which included principals, teachers and some Pravah staff. We landed at the Bangalore Airport at 9:40 a.m. and then carried on to the NIAS campus guest house which was our habitat till 6th Nov.

INFORMAL SESSION WITH JAIN SAHINI ON 1-11-'08 AT 4:30P.M.

In her session 'enlightening ways' she suggested:

1. Respect children's views
2. Give children a thoughtful approach to resolve conflicts
3. Give space to children
4. Share problems with children
5. Let the children know the reality of society and prepare them to accept whatever they receive in healthy way
6. Not to be intrusive and judgemental when children are sharing their experiences.
7. Don't pull them back in the name of safety or protection
8. Give them the freedom to move
9. Greatest thing to do in learning and living is mastering one's scary ideas
10. Allow the children to explore their inner abilities

OBJECTIVES OF CONFERENCE

1. To be a forum for academicians, researchers, teachers and administrators to come together, share their ideas, experiences and concerns with a concerted view to making schools a happier places of learning
2. To embed students' self-esteem at the heart of all school curriculum
3. To actively nurture the human side of students growth and development

The conference organised by The Teacher Foundation, was inaugurated by Mrs. Maya Menon (Director, The Teacher Foundation) was attended by prominent academicians from far and wide. The morning plenary session was started by screening of a film 'Shades of our school'. In this documentary, the nature of our schools and the aspects that are often ignored in our education system were brought to light. It captures interactions that take place between teachers and students, students amongst themselves, teachers and teachers, in classrooms and on playgrounds, in corridors and in staffrooms.

It highlighted routine school practices through specific instances. It replicated the insensitivity towards other's feelings (especially during Parent Teacher Meetings) and a sense of inadequacy in expressing thoughts, ideas and feelings. Authoritarianism and Judgment pervade a majority of teacher-student interactions in schools. It showed how we are a class ridden society with many social biases that still get perpetuated.

BRAIN STORMING SESSION:

1. Mrs. Archana Mahendale (Child's rights activist}
2. Mr. Rohit Dhankar (Secretary Digantar schools, Chairperson NFGC)
3. Dr. Poonam Batra (Designer of B.El.Ed.)
4. Dr. Sushmita Banerji (Prof. of Education}

All these prominent persons are stressed that the "Child" should be treated as an important stakeholder of schools. The teachers should be empathetic and cooperative to develop open-mindedness and to see deeper meanings. They should be non-discriminative, democratic and non-judgmental while resolving issues.

PLENARY SESSION 2 : MRS. ANJUM SIBIA AND MR. V.D. BHAT (Researching on CARING FOR STUDENT'S FEELINGS)

Schools as a social institution influence and shape the child's academic and emotional representation of the world. Emotions influence both the quality of thinking and information. Positive emotions enhance all kinds of cognitive tasks and activities. Negative emotions, on the other hand, can actually inhibit learning process and even the motivation to learn. The NCF 2005 brought out by NCERT has aptly considered the role of emotions as an integral part of cognitive development as well as a significant aspect of children's learning. The student's perspectives are not generally sought in schools. The psychological benefits of listening to students voices and perspectives could be that they are likely to see themselves as competent, capable and worthy of learning.

DAY 2 SCHOOLS AS SAFE, INCLUSIVE SPACES : JENNY MOSLEY - (OCT MODEL) WORKSHOP :

This session started with a workshop conducted by Jenny Mosley. Her OCT model (Quality Circle Time Model) is an excellent approach for promoting the social and emotional intelligence of all children and adults. It places the concept of relationships at the centre of all quality learning and teaching. She gave theoretical framework and demonstrated its practical application by working in a circle of Kendriya Vidya school children. She built a bridge with children such that they started giving spontaneous and logical responses. They are unaware of observers and immersed in Quality Time. They opened up their feelings freely without hesitation. It was a very inspiring workshop.

DAY 3 SCHOOLS AS HEALING SPACES : DR. SHEKHAR SHESHADRI (NIMHANS) -

Dr. Shekhar Sheshadri started the session by emphasising on the individual identity of every child. He said that children are not an amorphous form of humanity. Each child has an

individual identity. One believes that schools/classrooms are not space of acquisition of knowledge only. Each child has his identity to unfold in a space. Schools can be caring institutions treating the child as equivalent. When they have doubts in social and personal issues (regarding sexuality, relationships) resolve it non-judgmentally by giving framework of questions.

MY REFLECTION

My journey to the conference proved to be a true eye opener along with a much needed break from my moribund life. The workshop had rejuvenated me and has come like a spring at a point when I was losing interest in this age old and overburdened profession. I thank Pravah, for helping me to swim through my troubled waters in a unique way.

In those enriching sessions, I met with highly experienced academicians, stressing on the fact that schools are not just establishments where one create toppers, but shrines where one brings out the achiever in the child.

Hence, symmetry has to be maintained in the yin-yang elements of the students. Their cognitive, physical, social and emotional aspects of learning should be nurtured with care and interest and not weighted against a hefty pay package. Discipline means making the children to understand the concept of issue, not imposing issue by rules and regulations.

A major drawback in our schools is that the children are not allowed to bring out their individual potential. Another blot is the absence of a cordial relationship between the stakeholders of our schools (students, teachers, parents and management).

In Indian schools, all stakeholders (especially teachers and management) are efficient and have their own ideas and potentiality. Instead of putting cards on the table, we are holding our cards and trying to play the game as individuals. And last but not least, we all are trying to fit in the society and are ignoring the changes occurring around us.

The basic principles to bring out achievers in our schools are:

1. Motivation to change
2. Realisation to change
3. Advancing towards the change
4. Commitment towards the change
5. Dream thought action
6. Mobilising others towards the change
7. Determined efforts to change
8. Transformation

I conclude my thoughts by the famous quote -- **Tough times never last, tough people do.**

I thank all the initiators of Educative collector's and my highly inspiring co-collectors for making my journey special and memorable.

A Memorable Experience

SANTOSH CHAUDHARY

BHARAT NATIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL, NEW DELHI

When you long for something for a long time it surely happens. I have always wished for an association with some organisation which can help children who are being victimised everyday with so many problems. This wish of mine came true through the meeting with Pravah and as they say the rest is history. The subject on which I am working with Pravah required a wider frame and hence came the Bengaluru trip, which I can say has been my most learning trip till today.

The day we left for Bengaluru was full of excitement though one could sense some nervousness in the air too, a perfect blend of success. The three-day programme became one of my most cherished memories. Staying with so many different people, their different opinions and tastes made the entire experience a very learning one. All the speakers of the conference were highly educated and had an outstanding record. Being amongst them, I was motivated to introduce and talk about my school.

Some lessons I took from the meeting:

The first thing I learnt was that every institution must have a democratic environment. Children need their own space that must not be encroached upon. They must have the freedom of expression and most importantly, the freedom to think. We should allow them to explore, discover, and plan their lives accordingly. To take decisions and believe in it is what they should learn. In the end, what matters is your decisions, irrespective of the fact irrespective of the fact whether they were right or wrong. Child is the reflection of our school. To become a reflection, he would have to find his own identity. Individualism needs to be inculcated in children. In the process, parents and teachers must act only as their support system. They must get involved with children's lives but not interfere it. Parents involvement in school academic and co-curricular activities makes them a part of the institute and the emotional connect is maintained.

The relationship between a teacher and student can be very important for the student to shape his life. The teachers must make sure that they are available for the Children whenever required. They must try reaching a comfort level with the child where he is at ease in sharing his thoughts and feelings. It can help us to understand the state of the child's mind connect with the child mentally.

For the teachers to deliver this, adequate care and attention must also be given to them. There should be sufficient arrangements for them emotionally, socially, and financially so they can have better understanding and prospectus. It is important, very important.

In a session, Rohit Dhankar emphasised on life skills, peace education and environmental issues as a part of our teaching techniques which can be accomplished with regular training. Jean Mosley's quality circle time can be a very effective tool which should be inculcated in our teaching methods and it can be performed with all age groups.

The most important thing I learnt is that respecting student's dignity is very vital. They want to create their individualities in their own manner. They want to experience the pain themselves, and they are ready for the sacrifices as long as it is for their own dream, not their parent's or teacher's. We must learn to respect their decisions, their feelings, and their thoughts. So it's important that rather stressing our life and that of our children's, it's time to let go.

This has been a very learning and different experience, and a very memorable one. I want to thank everybody associated with Pravah and I keenly look forward to other such initiatives.

A Meeting with Jane Sahi

SANTOSH CHAUDHRY

BHARAT NATIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL, NEW DELHI

It was beautiful evening in the lawn of NIAS campus where the chirping of birds and fragrance of flowers touched every body's soul and heart. It was a great pleasure for us to sit with such educated and experienced people.

Initiating the session on safe schools, Jane Sahi recollected her childhood experience when she was 17 years old and when she learnt about Gandhi for the very first time in her school assembly. This generated her curiosity and made her read the book by Lewis Fisher about Gandhi. Finally, she shifted her base to India.

She believes that taking challenges, risks and being different is something which should be at least tried by every one. It makes life worth and makes every day special.

In the next part of the session, she expressed apprehension at the fact that we communicate with children in very sensitive manner. She strongly feels this is unhealthy for their development. It is important for the child to know the facts, as we cannot protect children all the time. Traumatic situations might turn over their life anytime and we cannot be with them all the time. Some day they have to step out in this world all alone and hence they should be taught of all the realities of this world along with hope, faith and optimism.

She also emphasised on the fact it is very improper to invade the child privacy without the child's permission. The elders must talk only when the child is ready for it.

The role of teacher is also very important in building up the society. Teachers and children form a bridge full of life experiences which make them responsible so that they can handle their life prudently. School is a place where conflicts and violence will be resolved, what is important is that the students must have the sense of hope, which can make them strong towards their life. Self reliance is one thing which can transform the life of a child completely. They must understand that they are the real heroes.

I asked Jane Sahi about the punishment that the child faces irrespective of the fact that they have extreme effects on the child especially if he is a small kid. I told her about had to face to demotion. I asked her that what should be done in such situations. She asked me about my opinion, if I felt the action was right, I replied "NO".

She told us that it is important for us to look deeply into our heart, do a little soul searching, feel the answers inside you and you will be ready with the solution.

She emphasised that self introspection helps us to find the real answers. Believing in yourself and your intentions to be the part of the solution can help you to find what you are searching for.

आतंकवाद

संतोश चौधरी

भारत नेशनल पब्लिक स्कूल, नई दिल्ली

खुदा ने तो नियामत बख्शी, खूबसूरत सी जिंदगी जीने की,
क्यों आज खुदा के नाम पर, दहशतगर्दों ने आतंक को पनाह दी?
जो पड़ी हैं बेकसूर लाशें, सब लगती हैं अपनों की सी
कैसे करें खात्मा इसका, दिखती है बड़ी लाचारी सी?
क्यों शिथिल है ये आत्मा, किसी भय या व्यथा से?
लड़ना है सबको मिलकर, आतंक के इस गुनाह से।

आतंकवाद-एक ऐसा दिल दहला देने वाला शब्द, जिसका नाम सुनते ही न जाने कितने ही हादसों की ज्वलंत तस्वीरें गवाही देती हैं कि देश आज आतंकवाद के साये में पल रहा है।

कब तक हम इस दहशतगर्दी का शिकार होते रहेंगे और बेगुनाहों की मौत पर रोते रहेंगे। कब तक धर्म, जाति तथा मजहब के नाम पर अपने ही अपनों का खून बहाते रहेंगे और राजनेता सियासती खेल खेलते रहेंगे? आखिर कब तक?

कब तक मासूमों के सर से ममता का साया उठता रहेगा?

कब तक माँ की आँखों से आँसुओं का सैलाब बहता रहेगा?

कब तक बेबस पिता जिंदगी से लड़ता रहेगा?

कब तक एक पत्नी हर आहट पर दौड़ती रहेगी?

और आखिर कब तक हम मरने वालों की सूची में किसी अपने का नाम न देखकर राहत की सांस भरते रहेंगे?

हमें जानना होगा उन तमाम बेबस मजबूरियों को जिनका फायदा उठाकर चन्द दहशतगर्द श्जेहादश के नाम पर मासूमों को अपने शिकंजे में इस कदर कसते हैं कि वो अपने आप से भी मोहब्बत करना भूल जाते हैं। उनकी नफरत इस कदर बढ़ जाती है कि वो अपनी जान के साथ-साथ हजारों बेगुनाहों को एक इशारे पर पलक झपकते ही लाशों के ढेर में बदल देते हैं। हमें पहुँचना होगा आतंकवाद की जड़ों तक और पहल करनी होगी उन सभी मूल कारणों को खत्म करने की, जिसके साये में फिर से कोई आतंकवादी न पनप सके। हमें तैयार करना होगा एक ऐसा सुन्दर समाज जिसमें जाति, धर्म, मजहब और सम्प्रदाय की दीवार न हो।

किसी भी भय या आतंक का अंत नफरत से नहीं बल्कि प्यार व अहिंसा से ही होगा। हमें यह विश्वास करना और दिलाना होगा कि प्यार व शांति हमारी कमजोरी नहीं बल्कि ताकत है। आज सम्पूर्ण विश्व मान चुका है कि हिंसा किसी भी समस्या का समाधान नहीं है। लेकिन आज आवश्यकता है पूरे विश्व के एक मंच पर आने की, एक जुट होकर उन सभी असमानताओं और विशमताओं को मिटाने की जिनमें नफरत और दहशतगर्दी जन्म लेती है। हर दिल में केवल और केवल प्यार की ज्योति जलाने की, एक बार फिर से अहिंसा की राह पर चलने की। उस महामानव, महान आत्मा की आज से फिर से बहुत आवश्यकता है। जिनसे मैं बार-बार गुहार करती हूँ- कि श्बापू फिर से आ जाओ, हिंसा का पाठ पढ़ा जाओ। भटक गए हैं बच्चे तुम्हारे, उनको राह दिखा जाओ।

बापू फिर से आ जाओ
देश का युवा आज दूंद में है फंसा,
रिश्ते हैं आगे या सब कुछ है पैसा।
दूंद में फंसे कहीं देर न हो जाए,
दिशा न मिलने पर कहीं देर न हो जाए।
बापू फिर से आ जाओ,
अहिंसा का पाठ पढ़ा जाओ।

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