

IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF EDUCATION

CREATION OF A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THAT IMPARTS QUALITY EDUCATION AND CULTIVATES PRECIOUS VALUES

INTRODUCTION

Quality education for all the students involves three very important components. One is the emergence and the nurturing of life skills, not in the sense of vocational skills, but in the sense of problem-solving skills, creative and critical thinking skills, self-directed learning skills in the students. The second is the imbibing of precious values like Truth, Idealism, Heroism, Perfection, Endless Progress etc. The last component is the creation of a learning environment which enables the students to learn according to their learning needs and levels, and at their own pace. This component is the most essential for taking into effective consideration the first two components.

WHY THE NEED FOR THESE THREE COMPONENTS

1. Skills for processing the information.

As everyone knows, an immense information explosion has occurred in the last two decades, and it is continuing rapidly with the increasing use of Internet. In Indian educational system, the effort till now is to compress as much information as possible in the curriculum of the students, and present it to the students in the form of textbooks, which are used as the chief or even the only source of information. The students are expected to 'learn' them which is an euphemism for the retention of the information in the mind. Examinations are designed essentially with the view to evaluate the capacity of the students to recall this information 'learnt' by them and to use them in the context of finding answers to the questions given.

In the modern day this information lies everywhere in the daily life of the student – nature, T.V., radio, newspaper, audio and video cassettes and books of all kinds in abundance, and above all the Internet, which replaces in a mind-boggling manner the need of textbooks as the only source of information. Further,

the Internet makes the task of retention and recalling of the information from the brain redundant because it does both the jobs admirably and efficiently.

What is important is the acquisition of the capacity to process the immense amount of information made available, – of whatever kind and in whatever quantity. Hereafterwards it is absolutely essential that the students learn all kinds of skills, like critical and creative thinking skills and problem solving skills, for processing the information so as to use them for their life.

2. Imbibing precious values.

Efforts are made half-heartedly or quarter-heartedly (!) to ‘impart’ values through textbooks, through teaching and through preaching. Knowledge of these values is also acquired from books, story-telling cassettes and films containing mythological stories or biographies of great men, which give to the students a vivid idea of how the values like Truth, self-giving and similar values were practised to their highest perfection. But there is no use in acquiring the knowledge about values without living them.

For example, take two of the most important values like Progress and Perfection. They can be learnt best only by living them. The idea of Progress and Perfection, that is, the knowledge or awareness of them, can be got from such sources as mentioned above. The practice of it in the daily life context can happen in the life of the student in the very process of learning.

3. Creation of an appropriate learning environment.

The two components mentioned above can be taken care of only when a learning environment is created in which the students can acquire the needed life skills and live the noble values even while learning.

Let us take the values of Progress and Perfection. They are associated in the life of the student with more marks as Progress and the first rank as Perfection. In life the former is measured by the acquisition of more and more things, like money and prosperity, and by the increasing success in career and status, and the latter is measured as reaching the topmost in career and status. This leads to competition, which, in turn, breeds ego. Real values are acquired not when they are based on ego but on the oneness of life, on the increasing feeling of others as oneself. A school can create a learning environment where this feeling is fostered, and there the students can acquire it naturally by living it in the process of learning.

EDUCATIONAL METHODS IN WHICH THESE COMPONENTS ARE IN-BUILT

There are several educational methods that create such a learning environment and that enable the students acquire both competence as well as values. These methods are effectively applicable from the preschool to higher secondary levels. They are *Glenn Doman method, Rishi Valley method, Phonic Sounds method, Audio Tape method combined with language games, Thematic Project Work method, Education by Design method, and Spiritual methods.*

Glenn Doman method enables the children to acquire reading skills and general knowledge very fast. *Rishi Valley method* enables all the students acquire the needed learning competencies at the primary level mainly through self-learning and fully well, and imparts to them in a natural manner values like helping others, cooperation, friendliness and many others. *Audio Tape method combined with Language Games* enables the students to acquire all the four essential language competencies easily and well. *Thematic Project Work and Education By Design methods* enable the students acquire important skills like problem solving, communication, organisation, leadership, critical and creative thinking etc. in an abundant measure. *Spiritual methods* enable them not only acquire knowledge but also live spiritual values like Silence, Truth, Love etc. Use of the latest educational technologies can be admirably incorporated in all these methods.

These methods are used all over the world but in a piecemeal manner. Efforts are made to use these methods in an integrated manner in Auroville schools and in some other places. An integrated use of these methods can effectively and intensely establish a powerful learning environment.

SCHOOL REFORMS

To create such a learning environment it is absolutely necessary that somewhat radical reforms be made in the present system of teaching/learning. As there is essentially not much difference in the way in which both private and government schools are organised, whatever ideas for reforms given below are applicable to and needed by both.

1. The first and foremost point to be focussed on is that the learning in these schools should be learner centred, that is, child/student-centred. The teaching/learning strategies should start from where the learner is and what he/she needs by way of learning. Their learning levels and needs should be assessed before the teaching/learning starts. On the basis of that, the teacher should decide what the student needs to learn, accordingly design and implement the learning/teaching strategy. If possible, a tentative learning programme should be written for each

student separately, even though learning competencies that should be attained by the students are the same for each level.

2. From the age of 9 onwards upto the higher secondary level it is possible to make the students become aware of what they should learn and the sequence in which they should do it, that is, their learning programme. The implementation of this learning programme can be made the joint responsibility of both the teacher and the students. The teacher should never assume the role of carrying the 'burden' of teaching because real learning is never a burden. Hence, during this implementation of the programme, the focus should be on the student acquiring the skills of self learning. The teacher should not try to 'teach' everything to the student.

3. Examinations should not be made the chief or only mode of assessment of the students. Appropriate assessment procedures should be adopted whose sole purpose must be to monitor the progress of the students in their learning. They should be used to identify the strong and weak points in their learning so that weak points can be strengthened and strong points can be fostered. This will enable the teacher to determine the learning pace of the students and use that knowledge for enhancing the learning of all the students in the class. In the modern day diverse modes of assessment are used, which will indicate as to what to assess and how. Hence it will be easier to find out and use the right and appropriate modes of assessment. It is also possible to invent new modes of assessment appropriate to the teachers' needs. Maintaining an individual portfolio for each child will enormously help in this endeavour.

4. A tentative time frame can be decided for learning each topic, and, if possible, for each student. There should never be a uniform and rigid time table, applicable to all the students.

5. Administrators should facilitate the student-centred role of the teachers. As the teachers focus on nurturing and fostering the learning of the students and on helping the students in tackling and removing the learning difficulties faced by them, so the administrators should focus on removing the hurdles in the student-centred functioning of the teachers and ease their work.

6. The administrators should arrange for the right kind of training for the teachers, according to the need of the teachers. The training can be such that the professional skills of the teachers are regularly upgraded. The administrators should organise educational trips for the teachers to get exposure to the innovative and effective educational methods, and to the use of latest educational technologies for enhancing the learning of the students. They should arrange for regular one-to-one meeting of more experienced teachers with less experienced

teachers so that the latter can get help from the former in dealing with the difficulties in their work. The experienced teachers can provide the help with more understanding than that which can be had in cluster level or block level meetings.

7. Use of library and other resources should become a way of life in the learning process. In using innovative and effective educational methods it is imperative that both the teachers and the students need to refer to various educational and information resources for teaching/learning their topic. Librarians, trained appropriately and working in tandem with the learning needs of the teachers and the students, will become a god-sent or administrator-sent (!) angel in the working of the school. Procedures can be introduced so that the choosing and buying of books can take place in consultation with the teachers and the students.

8. Model schools should be first established incorporating all the above reforms in their functioning.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

For such learning as described above to take place the teachers and the students need to have diverse kinds of educational resources and support. The foremost among them for the teachers are training manuals and facilities, and for the students the right and effective learning materials.

It has now become possible to get training in the use of all the methods mentioned above. Training in the use of *Glenn Doman method* can be got from *Shikshayata* in *Arasavanangkadu* in Thiruvavur District of Tamil Nadu and *Isai Ambalam School* in *Auroville*. Training in the use of *Rishi Valley method* can be had at *Rishi Valley* in *Andhra Pradesh*. *Isai Ambalam School* in *Auroville* can provide an in-service training in the use of this method. Training in the use of *Audio Tape method* and in *designing the language games* to go with it can be had at both *New Creation and Isai Ambalam Schools* in *Auroville*. Training in the use of *Thematic Project Work and Education By Design methods* can be had through trainers specially brought in from *Antioch University in U.S.A.* which is using these methods for all the learning taking place in its campus. Both the schools mentioned above can give in-service training in these methods. Training in the use of *spiritual methods* can be given in *Auroville* by *Subash* and *Lourdes* through camps organised for practising the yogic technique of Consecration. Training manuals for all these methods are under preparation in *Auroville*.

A resource base is being created by *Auroville Educational Resource Centre (AERC)* which is gathering as well as creating learning materials in the form of manuals, books, audio and video materials, CDs. *AERC* has quite a good collection of resource books to help in using all the above methods. It has made a

plan to prepare audio and video learning materials for using these methods. It has already prepared two CDs demonstrating the teaching of 6 *Language Games*, one video cassette on the practice of *Glenn Doman method*, one CD on *Science Songs on Medicinal Plants*, and one CD about the *Best Teacher* from the point of view of the children. (The preparation of all these CDs were funded by *Asha Organisation* of U.S.A.) It has planned to prepare 8 CDs containing *Language Games*, one CD for using *Audio Tape method*, CDs for helping in the use of *Rishi Valley method*, *Phonic Sounds method*, *Thematic Project Work method*, and *Education By Design method*, 4 more CDs about the *Best Teacher* and 4 CDs about the *Best Student*. It has also planned to prepare training manuals for all these methods. Further there is also a plan to print several booklets to help both the students and teachers if funds needed can be got.

Networking with educational organisations aspiring to provide quality education to the learners will be greatly helpful. *AERC* is presently exploring the mode of such a *networking*.

CONCLUSION

One of the wishes of Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram for Auroville was that it should be a place for ‘accelerating the evolution’ of the human being. In fact, the whole world has now become a place for accelerating the evolution. The path of evolution is from matter to life to mind to beyond mind. Humanity has been gradually developing its life and mental content to their maximum. In the last few decades the pace of this development has become very rapid. When such a maximum is reached it is quite natural to seek to go beyond. In humanity this seeking is being expressed as a wish to go beyond mind, to reach a new level, to chart a spiritual course in life. Creation of such a learning environment as mentioned above imparting quality education and cultivating great values will go a long way in ‘accelerating’ this development in a natural and harmonious way.

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POINTS FOR THE 15 MINUTE PRESENTATION OF OUR WORK
AT THE ASHA CONFERENCE IN BANGALORE
ON EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

1. PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE WORK OF AUROVILLE TAMIL SCHOOLS

Child centred; learning community created; enables the child to contact its soul; self-learning; blossoming of the child; everything is already in the child and to be brought out; teacher is a facilitator; life long learning; endless progress; no examination orientation; no status orientation; no earning orientation; learning process starts from the level of the child, occurs with its total consent; joy of learning.

2. HOW THIS WORK IMPACTS ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Child acquires the skills needed to face life, to lead life and to master life. Learns to think intelligently, originally and creatively; learns to solve problems; learns to collaborate with others in learning and hence learns to communicate clearly; learns to organise his learning, and when needed to practice leadership skills; learns values, like friendliness, love, helping others, beauty, truthfulness, frankness, openness etc., by living them.

3. HOW DO WE EVALUATE THE IMPACT

As it is, it is hard to evaluate the impact as there are not many who are practising our integrated approach. If, for a start, ASHA beneficiaries in the field of education wish to adopt such an integrated approach, then a sizeable number of educational institutions will be experiencing the immense benefits of this approach.

4. AREAS OF STRENGTHS IN OUR WORK

Ability to deal with each individual student with the support of individual learning programme for each student drawn upon his/her learning level and needs; ability to involve the community in its learning process; ability to use innovative and effective educational methods according to the needs of the

child and integrate them; ability to enable the child learn in freedom and with joy and comprehension, and that too at its own pace; ability to motivate the teachers and provide them with enough freedom as well as the most appropriate training.

5. DESCRIPTION OF OUR EXPERIMENTS AND WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT FROM THEM

We use 9 educational methods for educating our students. They are: Glenn Doman method at the preschool level, Rishi Valley method at the primary level, Phonic Sounds at the preschool and primary level, Audio Tape method, Thematic Project Work method and Education By Design method for the primary and secondary level, Basic Sentence Structure method, C.I.E.F.L. method and the Spiritual methods for the Young Adults and the teachers.

We have learnt that by rightly using these 9 methods a learning society can be created or evolved in the school.

6. HOW WILL BE OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE NETWORKING.

By disseminating our expertise; online training in the use of our methods and in using our approaches; by providing appropriate learning materials; by providing appropriate training materials.

The categories which we can effectively present at the conference are: **Government School Reforms** and **Educational Resources and Support**.

Subash, Lourdes and Steve