

PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence, said that "*perhaps the most disturbing single piece of data in my book comes from a massive survey of parents and teachers which shows a worldwide trend for the present generation of children to be more troubled emotionally than the last: more lonely and depressed, more angry and unruly, more nervous and prone to worry, more impulsive and aggressive. If there is a remedy, I feel it must lie in how we prepare our young for life. At present we leave the emotional education of our children to chance, with ever more disastrous results. One solution is a new vision of what schools can do to educate the whole student, bringing together mind and heart in the classroom. I can foresee a day when education will routinely include essential human competencies such as self-awareness, self-control, and empathy, and the arts of listening, resolving conflicts, and cooperation.*"

It has become a regular feature to find in the news papers that young boys and girls commit suicide for some reason or the other. All of them attended the schools and colleges and received 'good' education. If this education that they got for such a long time did not teach them how to accept these small setbacks in life, then what worth is this education? Has our education prepared us only for the examinations but not for life? It is extremely rare to find an illiterate boy or a girl attempting or committing suicide. Has our education made our children more weak than making them stronger?

Then, what is the purpose of education?

Earlier, education was considered as a hallowed profession of gaining knowledge. Has it now become an investment for prosperous living in the future?

We all agree that the purpose of education in general and primary education in particular, is to give our children adequate confidence in themselves, to give them a set of values that would make them

responsible citizen and make them balanced people, in addition to giving them the skills of reading, writing and analysing.

We work under severe contradictions. On the one side, we have 40% of the entrants to school education are poor, rural and girl students. A large number of them do not complete primary education. The quality of instruction is poor and they suffer from out dated teaching methods, inadequate infrastructure and low motivation levels. There is hardly any useful learning taking place. On the other side, we have Children from middle & upper middle classes in the urban areas, who face tremendous academic competition. There is too much of pressure for performance, even at the cost of holistic growth. The infrastructure is fairly good but education is expensive. It is market driven.

Between these two extreme positions, lies a wide array of mostly mediocre practices. Rarely do we find the education system fostering the natural process of spontaneous, self-motivated self-education in which children learn just as they play out of innate curiosity & urge to acquire knowledge of the environment.

The thrust of the Central and State Governments in universalising elementary education so far has been on three aspects namely, *universal access*, *universal retention* and *universal achievement*. We have succeeded to a large extent in the first, made good progress in the second but are far from realising the third.

Concerted efforts made in these areas have resulted in significant expansion of elementary education in the country. The number of primary schools has increased from 2.10 lakh in 1950-51 to 6.40 lakh and number of upper primary schools from 13,596 to 2.06 lakh respectively in 2000-01. 95% of the rural population in the country has a primary school within 1 kilometre and 85% an upper primary school within a distance of 3 kilometres. With 15 Crore children enrolled and 30 lakh teachers, we have one of the largest elementary education systems in the world.

The quality of elementary education has been one of the major concerns right from 1950s. The National Policy on Education, 1986

brought to the forefront the need for quality improvement in terms of learning achievement of children. As a result, greater efforts have been made to impart competency based learning, particularly from 1990 when the Minimum Levels of Learning (MLLs) were introduced. A clear shift from teacher dominated teaching to a child centred approach is being attempted in most states. Integrated Textbooks which include workbooks are replacing traditional books. A large number of teaching, learning and reading materials have been developed, with active participation of teachers and NGOs. Efforts are continuing to promote competency based learning both at primary and upper primary levels by re-orienting and training teachers.

The area where we failed is in building the capacities of teachers. *Quality of education is just as good as the quality of teachers.* We emphasised on increasing the number of students and teachers in the system but did not spend our time and energies on the quality of teacher education, which is far from being satisfactory. We have to set right this anomaly at the earliest because we expect the teacher to be the custodian of values and also a role model.

It is ultimately left to each one of us in the educational field to move one small step forward towards this transformation of vision towards reorientation of values and objectives of education. Whether they can be realized is down in significant part to our courage as educators, and our ability to work with others with a similar vision.

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