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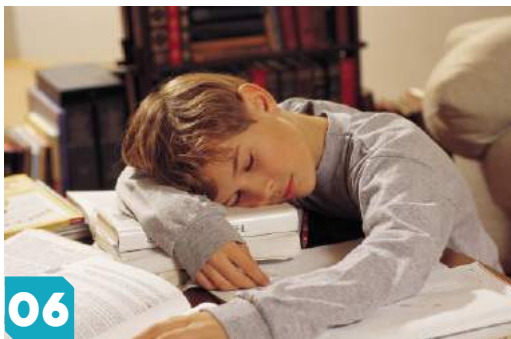


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Watch this space for the **Best 3 Entries!!**

Mentor wishes its readers a very **Happy Children's Day**
For the child in you..



NEW THINKING MEANS A NEW QUESTION!



‘Google Uncle’, as I like to refer to the most popular search engine, has all the answers. Any question posed to him and he instantly churns out innumerable answers. Search engines work on the logic that the answers are all there, the information is all there, what is required is asking the right questions!

I have noticed several times that many of my colleagues fail to find the relevant or desired information while at work. This can be frustrating, especially when research is an integral part of the work we do at LXL Ideas. Over the years, I have realised that not everyone knows ‘how’ to ask the ‘right’ questions to Google!

If we dig a little deeper, we realise that this has to do with the way we were brought up and the manner in which our schools educated us. A normal upbringing for most of us at home has primarily focused on following instructions and not asking questions. Irrespective of whether they are right or wrong, valid or invalid, questioning has been rarely encouraged. In school too, our ability to question is questioned. The focus of our educational system has always been and continues to be ‘answers’. We are supposed to learn the answers and the more we can answer, the better

grades we get. Schooling teaches us to search for the right answers, give the right answers and derive the right solutions. Eventually, it all boils down to being about the answers.

Our educational system has diminished our ability to ask questions in a very conscious and systematic manner!

“Our educational system has diminished our ability to ask questions in a very conscious and systematic manner.”

It is already apparent in our world today that all the information is out there and learning information is definitely not the key to a good life in future. Seeking the right information from the abundance of information out there is a necessary skill. This simply means that we need to teach our children to ‘ask questions’ and this for me seems so contrary to what we are doing in schools today.

We have no choice but to gear our pedagogical processes and ourselves to focus more on the child’s ability to raise questions.

This is easier said than done. Our entire pedagogy, teaching style, curriculum, examination and grading system needs a relook. While we are all aware that this will take time. In the meantime, what must be done to teach the skill of questioning, critical thinking and problem solving to our children?

Another pressing reason why we should be teaching this skill to our children is to solve the new problems we are facing as a planet and the undiscovered problems we will face in future. The world will throw up to our children, very intriguing and unexpected social, economical, political, environmental, religious and spiritual challenges that need to be addressed. Past knowledge, problem solving skills and information will be of little help in solving the future problems.

New thinking and innovation will be key and the basic founding block of any new thinking is a new question!

Mr. Syed Sultan Ahmed,
Managing Director, LXL Ideas



HOMWORK TASKS FOR STUDENTS

Ms. Komal Singh

Ms. Komal Singh started her teaching career in 1979 at DAV Public School, Chandigarh. She moved on to being a teacher at Yadavindra Public School, Mohali and eventually ended up serving as the Vice Principal of the same school. She was then selected to head The Millenium School at Mohali, an initiative by Educomp in the year 2007 and continues to head it. The school is now called Learning Paths School. Ms. Singh has also trained extensively with Cambridge University and is an examiner for their entire range of exams, right from YLE to IELTS. With extensive experience as an educator, Ms. Komal Singh sheds light on the changing trends in homework tasks given to students.

Over the years, there have been multiple debates on whether home-work should be given at all; how much homework should be given; should homework be graded/marked et al.

I remember enjoying doing my home-work as a child. It gave me a sense of achievement and I seldom needed help. I loved the 'stars' I got on the pages of my note books! But I am talking of the 60s and 70s when life was slower and maybe easier.

NEED FOR HOMEWORK

As a young teacher of English in a public school, I admit giving home-work but it was never too much for I wanted students to do original work which, I felt, was best done under my eagle eye. Nevertheless, a portion was given as home-work but only as much as I could check and return within time.

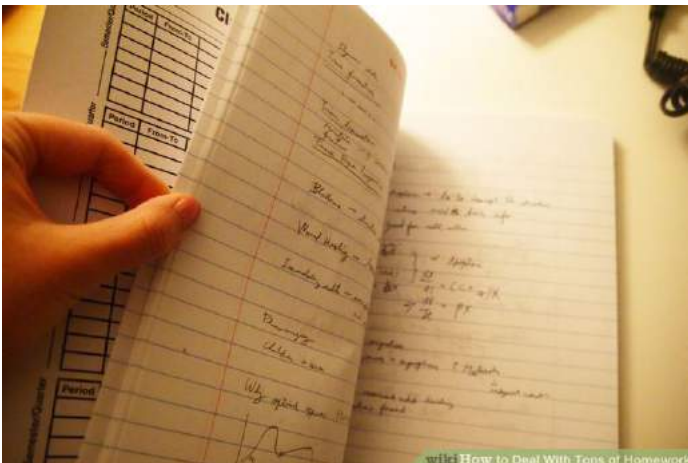
As an administrator, first as a

Vice Principal, and now as a Principal, I feel some home-work should be given to keep the concepts 'alive' in the student's mind, but too much may end up landing on the parent, elder sibling, or a tutor's plate, thereby losing out on the initial idea of helping the child learn better. A home-work schedule needs to be made so that every day's amount of work can be monitored and a student does not spend his/her entire evening, filling reams of paper. The date of the submission of home-work also needs to be made clear so that a student knows how much time is required to complete and submit the work.

Further, home-work should be assigned because it will encourage good study habits, and let students know that studying takes place at school as well as at home. Moreover, the home-work assigned in any subject should be seen to be beneficial to the students and not given just for the sake of giving. Teachers have to be trained to use home-work effectively.

In any case, home-work should be assigned appropriate to the age group it is being given to. An age old thumb rule is that an assignment should be of 10 minutes multiplied by the grade the student is in. So naturally higher classes will get more home-work to do than lower classes.

In the lower classes, home-work should be given essentially to





- Parents, by and large, like their wards to get home-work. For one, it keeps students busy for at least a couple of hours every evening. For another, they do like to keep abreast of what is happening in class.

I have noticed, over the years that parents like the traditional methods of assigning home-work---as in a pen/paper assignment. They think less of home-works like doing a crossword puzzle, watching a good TV show, just reading, or doing an experiment in the kitchen!

So, on the whole, home-work should be given for it suits all stakeholders. However, it needs to be monitored carefully so that meaningful work is accomplished, not just pages filled for the sake of filling them.

How has the approach to homework changed with the advent of technology?

One of the most important outcomes of the advent of technology in schools is that parents can now view homework assignments.

Further, homework has acquired an element of fun to it for teachers have endless resources available to them to

encourage reinforcement of concepts and simple skills taken up or introduced in the class. In higher grades, home-work should be aimed at improving school achievement.

assigned to ensure that what has been done in class is reinforced, concepts taught are strengthened and students are given the opportunity to explore further knowledge on the chapter/topic/story at hand.

“ An age old thumb rule is that an assignment should be of 10 minutes multiplied by the grade the student is in ”

- The home-work assigned should be of adequate difficulty to be challenging enough for the student, but, at the same time, should be such that the student can finish it comfortably with no external help.
- Parents do need to be able to supervise the home-work successfully, but without any stress about the assignment.
- The length of the home-work should not take away from the student, the time to do other home/personal activities.

PARENTS’ ROLE

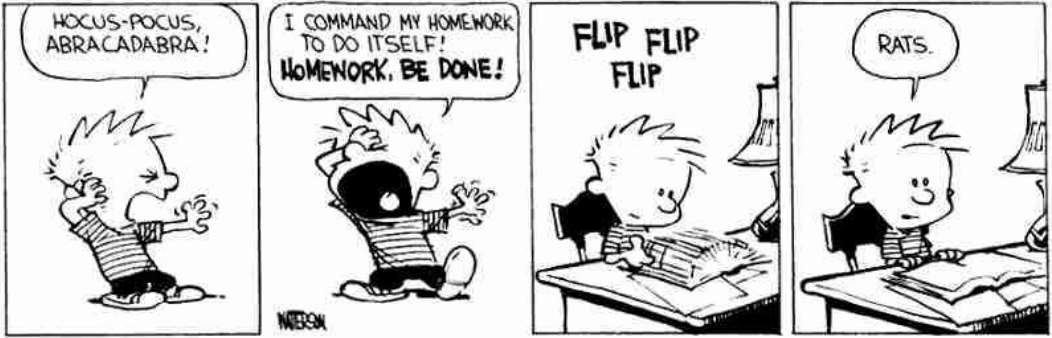
Parents are very often terrorized by home-work and consider it a personal ordeal to handle the study hours of their children at home. Thus, the mushrooming home tutors and study centres!

Parents do need to have a supervisory role to ensure that the ward is putting in some pre-decided study hours, but beyond that it is unfair for a school to expect parents to suddenly develop an expertise in all subjects.

Hence the following guide lines need to be followed while assigning home-work:

- Home-work should be





use for making assignments more meaningful and interesting.

“ With the use of technology, like say ‘Google Classroom’, there is an option to allow for differentiated guidance. ”

The learning outcomes remain the same but now teachers have a large selection of intriguing and innovative assignments at hand that have turned homework tasks to something much more than mere drudgery.

Today’s classrooms are also filled with students from diverse backgrounds, all with their own unique learning styles and needs. Meeting the demands of such a classroom can prove difficult, even for the most able teacher.

Now a teacher can actually set assignments in any media, suitable to a child’s specific needs, keeping the same learning outcomes in mind as those of the rest of the class. No one’s self esteem is hurt or damaged and a student with a different learning style feels as much a part of the class as anyone else.

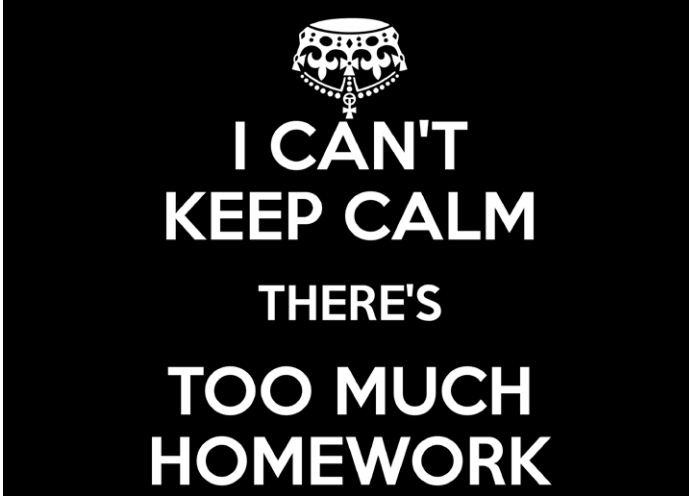
How do schools and children approach homework nowadays? By adding technology to school classrooms, homework has undergone a makeover in schools and at home. For instance, speaking and listening, which traditionally took place in lessons because of the reliance on the teacher, can now take place outside class, in the home by sharing MP3 files.

- Students can record, correct, and generally gain more confidence in handling such tasks for purposes of grading. This encourages reticent learners and allows the teacher to analyse skills in detail, without leaving students feeling exposed in a classroom setting.
- Digital learning can also create a seamless feedback loop between teachers and students.

In a non-digital environment, students complete their homework, hand it in and get it back a few days later, marked with comments that the teacher hopes they will read and absorb. This process is problematic in two ways. Firstly, if a student has misunderstood the task or found it too hard, the teacher will often not discover this until they have moved on. Not only has the learning opportunity been lost, but time has been wasted and the student may have had a frustrating and demoralising experience. Secondly, many students just look at their marks/grades – or the amount of red pen on the page – to find out how they have done, before sticking the work in a folder never to be looked at again.

But with the use of technology, like say ‘Google Classroom’, there is an option to allow for





the help of mind-mapping tools which are free and easy to use. This is a skill that would benefit every student and save him/her from laborious and tedious note taking and making.

- If the teacher needs to communicate something to the students, a recording of the instructions can be made and e-mailed.
- There are apps available that allow a teacher to write questions, notes, or problems on the screen and then record audio to explain what is happening. This can then be shared online for instant access for students anywhere or saved and sent as an attachment for access at a later stage.

Learning beyond the classroom can be very different in a digital world. Homework can be recalibrated as a process that is more meaningful and more engaging. It can become an authentic extension of learning, with students supported and guided in ways that were previously not possible!

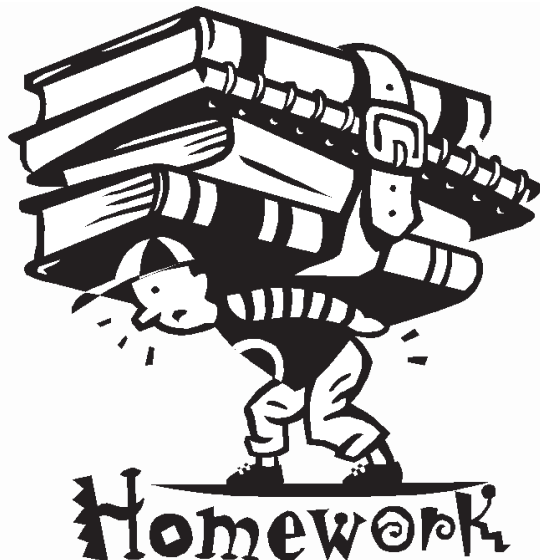
differentiated guidance. By issuing students with a deadline to submit a first draft (which can be an introductory paragraph, an essay plan, an attempt at the first few questions and so on), teachers can give feedback at a midway point in the homework process. By being able to see which students are having problems and what those problems are, the teacher can clear up misunderstandings, provide extra support or even alter the parameters of the task. The piece of work is then sent back to the student to complete – and as they continue working they naturally engage more effectively because of the feedback. Difficult concepts can also be revisited through apps and experiments can be viewed on YouTube as many times as a student needs.

place across continents.

What are the alternatives to homework used by teachers/schools?

- Homework can be posted digitally so that it can be accessed from anywhere and can even be completed, graded, and returned digitally. This method also provides a range of accessibility options for students with disabilities, such as screen readers in Google Classroom.
- Learners can be helped to organize their thoughts with

Moreover, homework no longer needs to be a solitary activity; it can be interactive, social and even global! Without the constraint of location, homework can be collaborative; not only with other members of the class and teachers, but with students in any part of the world. The possibilities are endless – imagine a project on environmental issues taking





EYE EXAMINATION IN SCHOOL CHILDREN

Ms. Farida Raj

Ms. Farida Raj is the Director at the Centre for Special Education in Hyderabad and has been a regular author for MENTOR. She writes immensely and profusely on issues concerning psychosocial and physical disorders in children. With sound subject matter knowledge and enthusiasm to be heard she takes pleasure in spreading awareness among teachers, parents and educationists about sensitive issues in children. In this informative article for MENTOR, Ms. Farida Raj, sheds light on the relevance of eye examination in school children.

Eight-year-old Arjun was having a tough time in school. He was punished every day by almost all teachers. The parents were appraised about his inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. Teachers complained that Arjun was impatient, restless fidgety and most importantly did not pay attention to what was being taught in the class. His memory and language acquisition skills were poor too. The teachers implied to the parents that he may have hyperactivity disorder. Out of sheer desperation the parents consulted me. A thorough assessment revealed that he did not have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). I suspected behaviour could be vision related. A visit

to an Ophthalmologist to test for eyesight confirmed my suspicion. He had +1.75 in the right eye and +2.75 in the left. The poor child could not see clearly. No wonder he was restless and fidgety in class!!

The Real Problem

When a school going child does not do well academically, his failure to perform at the age appropriate level is attributed to short attention span, hyperactivity or dyslexia – a reading disability, but seldom to a problem of sight and vision.

The most common disorder in children is poor visual acuity [eyesight] due to refractive error which can be corrected with spectacles. Another disorder is squint (strabismus). It is a condition where one eye focuses on an object and the other turns inwards, outwards, upwards or downwards, thus preventing the eyes from working properly together. Some children may have intermittent squint which may not be easily detected by a lay person. In case of near vision, often one eye converges and the other eye diverges – this means that the child will have difficulty in coordinating the eyes for near vision. The images falling on the retinal area are not linked together neurologically, to perceive a single combined image. The child may momentarily see double making reading difficult.





Most squints happen in young children. The younger the child, more the possibility of him being binocularly unstable. This means that he will have difficulty in trying to co-ordinate the eyes for near vision. Since maximum learning happens between 0 to 7 years, he misses out on a lot of first hand experiences.

Some children with poor visual acuity may complain that print swims around on the page or appears out of focus or is not uniformly black. There may be a child who turns the head either to the right or to the left or he may switch from one eye to another with alteration of head position. In such cases, he may be searching for a suitable position so that he can read. Some may have faulty eye movement and therefore skip or re-read lines. The struggle with the instability of the print is so great that the comprehension of the content is lost. Such children tend to develop abnormal visual scanning and processing habits as a reaction to their difficulty with print. A good and observant teacher should be able to notice the postural abnormalities.

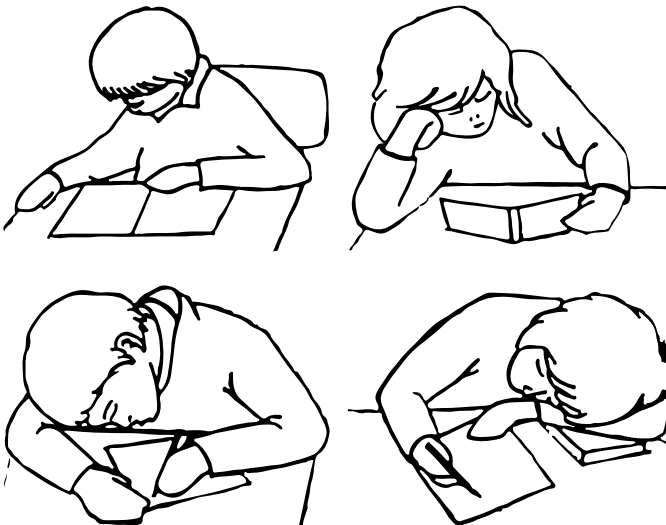
It may be helpful to consider why they arise. It is important that both teachers and parents are sensitized to notice the signs of visual strain in children even in those who wear spectacles and refer them to an ophthalmologist to check for visual acuity. Over the years I have found that for every ten children that I assess for scholastic backwardness, three have a refractive error! It is better to “over” refer than to fail in providing him the treatment he needs. If the condition is not rectified, he will remain a poor reader. Visual problems and their implications have tremendous impact on a child’s learning and success in school. A key factor is fatigue. Yet, 90 % of children start school without having an eye examination.

of sight and vision. Eye sight is simply the ability to see something clearly at a distance of twenty feet, whereas vision is the ability to take in information coming through the eyes, process it and draw meaning from it. Since 75 percent to 95 percent of a child’s learning comes to him through the visual pathways, it can be assumed that any interference in these pathways will certainly get in the way of his academic growth.

Unfortunately, most eye exams and screening tests in our system, merely test the 20/20 eyesight. Visual acuity though important, plays a small role in what good vision is. Visual skills such as tracking, focusing, eye teaming, adequate convergence, directionality and form perception, important for academic success, are almost never tested. Deficiencies in the visual skills are more often associated with problems in classroom learning. This can be treated with vision therapy.

“Deficiencies in the visual skills are more often associated with problems in classroom learning. This can be treated with vision therapy.”

Let us understand the role



Abnormal postures while reading and writing

Bad hizz a boig pup.
The big pup lug in memud
The pup can sit in hizz
laq.
Bad is mad eat hizz pup.

A sample of Ram's writing

Ram had perfect vision yet he made mistakes while writing. He was labelled as being dyslexic. It was by chance that an eye doctor was able to diagnose that Ram had problem with directionality. Vision therapy helped him overcome the difficulty.

Visual skills and reading
Reading is one of the most important skills that a child needs to learn. It is the



foundation on which he builds new skills, expands knowledge and derives great pleasure. Reading demands the child to focus on the reading matter held at a distance of 14 to 16 inches from the eyes. The two eyes should accurately track stimuli. Difficulty with tracking can cause loss of space when reading, skipping over words, poor or hesitant reading, careless errors and difficulty with eye-hand activities.

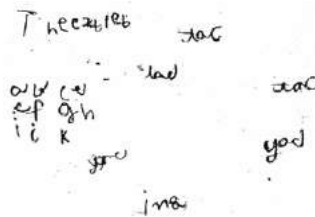
Another important visual skill is **eye focusing**. The eye muscles make it possible for us to focus on near point for a sustained period of time and switch focus from near to far and back again. A deficit in this area may cause blurred vision, visual fatigue, trouble copying from the board and avoidance of near point activities.

Eye teaming is one more visual skill which is crucial to success in academics. It is the ability of the eyes to work together as a team, move smoothly and be able to sustain an activity for more than 30 seconds. If it does not happen then the images falling on the retinal area will not be linked together neurologically to be perceived as a single continued image, the child may see two images momentarily. Any deficit here will affect processing of visual information, especially at near when reading and writing. The child may complain of eye strain, blurred vision, headaches, words may run together while reading, difficulty with writing/spacing, covering or closing one eye and difficulty keeping attention on reading and writing tasks.

The act of reading requires both the eyes to turn inwards so that they focus on the reading task. Most children learn to do this properly while in some the eyes

have a tendency to deviate outward. The child has to make a conscious effort to maintain fixation on the reading task. He may lose his place while reading, may leave out small words or add a word or two to make the sentence make sense.

This brings on tiredness and the child avoids a reading task. This is the child who is fidgety or may look out of the window rather than be attentive to reading. Some children do not have a settled left to right sense of order. And since reading and writing in English and other European languages is from left to right, one can assume that they may have tremendous difficulty with reading, writing and spelling.



A child with unsettled left to right sense of order. He has copied cat as 'tac', and boy as 'yod' from the black board

Studies indicate that 60 percent of children identified as “problem learners” actually suffer from undetected problems in vision or hearing modalities and in some cases have been inaccurately diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Learning Disability [LD]. We should interpret children's disinterest, confusion, behaviour

or lack of comprehension as signals that something is not right.

Identifying the problem

There is an urgent need to identify children with challenging behaviours early in order to increase school success and decrease the escalation of more social and academic problems.

It is important to be aware of the variations of visual development in children that can be corrected with vision therapy, so that the problems in sight and vision are not interpreted as behaviour problems or a learning disability. Teachers must sensitize the parents that when they take their child to an eye professional, they must demand that his visual skills are also tested along with eye-sight.

Signs of problem in visual acuity

- Moves head while reading
- Holds head at a peculiar angle
- Switches from one eye to another with alteration of head posture
- Difficulty in copying from the black board
- Often rubs eyes
- Watering of eyes
- Complains of headaches
- Copying from neighbours, being attentive only when teacher speaks and not when she writes
- Shabby/ messy handwriting





DEMOCRATIC LEARNING

Mr. Ashok Singh Guleria

Mr. Ashok Singh Guleria writes extensively on pedagogical issues and children's behavioural concerns. He is currently working as Head of the English Department, curriculum planner and Academic Coordinator cum Teachers' Trainer at the Akal Academy Group of Schools run by Kalghidhar Education Trust, Baru Sahib, at Kajri (Uttar Pradesh).

He strives to develop and facilitate the building of a robust and sustainable teaching-learning fraternity and in this article for MENTOR, Mr. Guleria brings out the importance and relevance of elective subjects in schools.

The success of a school depends upon the outcome of learning aims and objectives of its curriculum plan. Education policies advocate more autonomy to students therefore it is increasingly important to understand the learning styles of children during the formative years itself. In 1983, Howard Gardner a psychologist and professor of neuroscience developed his theory of intelligence that differentiates intelligence and IQ. In his researches, Howard defines intelligence as "skills and abilities that enable anyone to learn, gain knowledge and skills. He further labeled different types of intelligences known as learning styles:

- Verbal-Linguistic (Word Smart)*
- Logical-Mathematical (Logic Smart)*
- Visual-Spatial (Picture Smart)*
- Auditory-Musical (Music Smart)*
- Bodily-Kinesthetic (Body Smart)*

- Interpersonal (People Smart)*
- Intrapersonal (Self Smart)*
- Naturalistic (Nature Smart)*

In a classroom situation in schools, teachers can try to give children multiple options to test their skills and intelligence by giving them different or a combined task to bring out their skills. This will provide them the pipeline view to see through, know and identify their nascent potentials to be shaped further as their own judgments. However, schools and teachers can build up their own intelligence measuring tools to find out the multiple skills among children to decide the electives they need to choose with various tests

Connect to students' personal interests

Democratic learning practices in the current school scenario will be more effective if the learners of all age groups can see the value of what they are learning from their school experiences. There is wider consensus among educationists about connecting the course of studies to the real world implications. Getting and judging the value of the course by themselves within a broader academic framework can help students sustain motivation and persist through challenges and setbacks. The schools, teachers and parents alike can help students by exposing them to choices basis their personal interests. It is through child counseling sessions, personal sessions with children





and parents that appropriate electives can be fixed for the kids. Schools taking big initiatives can group the entire school learners into different categories and assign them roles and responsibilities under different hobby clubs under the teachers' guidance and care.

Passing Relevance to Students' Academic Lives

Right from the beginning of early years at school, a child in primary class starts showing up his capabilities, interests, likes and dislikes in academics. Consequently, it is important to explain to students how their course will help prepare them for subsequent courses in ensuing years. However, it is crucial for the school teachers and parents to develop core learning values among the learners via offering them choices in electives to develop relevance and interests. A child doing extremely well in Elementary Maths or Drawing or Art and Craft can be directed to streamline his interests to go ahead in the same field to carry on his academic line to fulfill his professional aims. Here at this level, offering choices in relevant fields will help making children free and independent learners. A child's academic and elective interests need synchronization through concrete planning and

participation to reach fulfillment and achievement.



Meeting the Diverse needs of Individuals

Individuals, on the basis of their, age, class, gender and other social, religious, cultural and economic requirements have diverse needs. Education is the tool of fulfilling these requirements for the self and others in a way that suits all. It is sad but true that our education system focuses on academic performance but does not help the children to decide their future in their early school life. The career paths that they would like to choose are set in traditional ways of guiding and instructing the school children and adhere to core subjects only. This often leads learners to go for subjects that neither suit to their careers nor fulfill the diverse needs and other concerns of life. Schools on many occasions can easily

hold counseling and guidance sessions every month inviting people of different fields, professions such as journalists, writers, artisans, potters, theatre actors, dancers, musicians etc. who would happily visit the schools. Similarly, short duration workshops can be arranged to help children identify their individual talents.

Electives to inspire, Creativity, Innovation and Skills

Good learning advances through innovation. Children learn better if schools develop new and better ideas and methods to foster creativity and innovation. The demand for creativity and creative thinking is increasing and will fuel economies in the future, yet our students are less prepared to become innovative thinkers of tomorrow. Fortunately, these skills can be enhanced and taught by offering opportunities through various school based curricula. By creating a free and independent learning environment the schools can engage their children in skill development activities via indoor or outdoor surveys, projects, seminars, action research, and sports events or by organizing social awareness drives etc.

Choosing Options at Schools

Recent developments in curriculum designing by the education boards and schools alike, the scope of going for electives has widened. Both CBSE and ICSE boards have recently introduced a variety of elective subjects for the learners ranging more than 40 courses under the Elective Subject's Scheme. Besides, there are a variety of vocational courses to meet the needs of skill development of secondary level grades ranging from; Electronics Technology, Medical Laboratory Techniques Fashion Design and





changes in our school systems, curriculum framework and educational programmes and policies of the governments have opened before the learners, greater choices in deciding their courses and curriculum. This has set forth before the stakeholders, the challenge of giving to the children an independent, holistic and autonomous learning in schools which is a highly desirable and ineluctable but challenged concept in education. Ushering into this learning environment, our educational institutions and schools can bring and create a purely egalitarian learning community thereby opening the doors of democratic learning to bring one and all to grow and develop in the realm of intrinsically controlled but essentially free and independent environment. Just imagine a school or an educational system where teaching-learning experiences are directed, designed and delivered in such a way that every child finds himself/herself at the helm towards undertaking an independent, comprehensive, self-decisive voyage concerning academics as well as other aspects of life.

Clothing Construction, Library and Information Sciences, Mass Media Studies, Media Production, Travel and Tourism, Banking, Retail, Electronics Technology etc. However, it is up to schools to provide the options judging the best choices for each learner.

values in learning in our schools. There is nothing new about the idea that students should be able to participate, individually and collectively in making decisions. This conviction has long played a role in schools now being sophisticatedly designated as progressive, democratic, open, free and experimental. Additionally in educational philosophies have been called developmental, constructivist, holistic, intrinsic or learner-centered and in the daily teaching-learning routine of teachers, the natural instinct is to treat children with respect love care and guidance.

“Children learn better if schools develop new and better ideas and methods to foster creativity and innovation the demand for creativity and creative thinking is increasing and will fuel economies in the future”

Enhancing scope of Individual Life Skills

We come across so many children who pick careers thrust upon them by their parents. Nowadays, so many new fields are opening up, offering unconventional career choices which are just as well paying as the common professions. It is important for parents to talk to their child, be sensitive to his/her natural skills and try and hone them.

Concluding Thoughts

Education in totality aims to engender fundamental capacities among children such as successful learners, self-reliant individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Recent emerging

Image Courtesy: <http://homeeducationgateshead.org> | www.globalstudentnetwork.com | <https://static01.nyt.com> | <http://mba.uconn.edu/> | rossvilles.eq.edu.au



In recent times, there has been constant cry advocating for the development of democratic



NURTURING CREATIVITY AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Dr. Geoffrey Fisher

An experienced educator and a dynamic school leader, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, is the Head of Academy at the Aga Khan Academy Hyderabad. His career has spanned positions as Principal, Headmaster, Founding Head, and an IB school leader across various academic institutions in Asia, Middle East, Europe, Australia and South America. He has a diverse educational background himself, having completed his education across different countries. Dr. Fisher holds a Doctorate in School Improvement and Effectiveness specializing in school leadership. MENTOR interviewed Dr. Geoffrey Fisher to find out his views on the future of education. Here are a few excerpts from the interview...

“Education is the only force available in the modern world that can create and sustain social change! A modern life and employment requires persistence, creativity, flexibility and the capacity to apply knowledge and learning into new areas. Good education will assist development of these characteristics through a mixture of rigor, diverse challenges and diverse tasks. The skills of learning and how to adapt them is the key.”

The Aga Khan Academy, Hyderabad represents a new idea in education by being a

school with a social purpose acting as a bridge between development and education.

The mission of the Academies is to educate students for leadership by providing world-class education for exceptional students with strong leadership potential, irrespective of social or economic background or ability to pay.

To achieve this vision, all Academies deliver their curriculum through a partnership with the IBO (International Baccalaureate Organisation). All academics, sports and



activities are delivered through a values framework emphasizing 5 strands - ethics, pluralism, civil society and governance, economics for development and cultures and heritage.

You have over 20 years of experience in education! What do you think has changed over the years? What is your opinion on the Education Industry in India, as against the world?

It is fascinating how technology has brought changes in the teaching and learning environment. As an educator, I would say that teaching has become a more interesting profession since it involves active engagement of both the teacher and the taught. It has become engaging and that of course, is a welcome change.

The Indian education space is very diverse both economically and culturally. So it can be both challenging and interesting at the same time since it brings opportunities to blend contemporary and classical learning values. Again, in the recent past, the Indian system





Organisation requires us to provide professional development courses for all teachers. Our teachers are updated constantly through development in knowledge and in building capacity for learning situations. Our social purpose requires us to support the development and further training of government school teachers through our Outreach programmes. In this context, the quality of English is developed as well. While some courses we follow are IB school mandates, there are other initiatives for developing the pedagogical skills and teaching expertise of teachers, such as IT and computing, and is based on their needs from time to time.

of education has seen a drastic change. Today, the quality of educational services in India has become world class and this, along with its diversity, makes it an interesting and exciting space in which to learn.

- Empathy and care for human beings matters

How does the Aga Khan Development Network work for the development of students and teachers?

The Academy is mandated as a 'centre of education excellence' and has two goals that work towards raising the quality of teaching and learning in India and Telangana. One is to provide a world class education for students who would otherwise not be able to access this opportunity. Our global network allows us to network between countries through exchange programs for instance. Students come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This blend helps promote empathy and creates an exciting learning environment. We are a very unusual school!

Tell us about a recent book you read and your key takeaways from it as a school leader?

I am reading a book by Steven J. Gould, a noted essayist in the area of science and evolution. He challenges the way I think through his exploration of history, faith and science. I value that enormously. It is important to challenge your thoughts and existing beliefs from time to time. This helps you evolve.

Your views on the educational needs of a child or needs of the next generation?

My son is both a lawyer and a film maker. I admire his capacity

“ Our students come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This blend helps promote empathy and creates an inclusive learning environment ”

What directed you into entering the field of education? How has the journey been from Africa, London to now? What would be your key takeaways?

Teaching is in my family. A fourth generation educator, I started to teach quite naturally in between two courses that I was pursuing. I loved the profession and eventually took it up seriously. The journey so far has been a roller coaster with different locations contributing to my development. I have learnt some things that I shall remember for life.

- Passion is important in all that you do
- Never get out of date

The International Baccalaureate





to manage a portfolio life. It is a skill which all people will need in the future. Moreover, I feel that education for the future must be a blend of problem solving and creativity skills. A classic blend of these two skills would be essential for the leaders of tomorrow. They must be able to earn a living on the one hand, using problem solving skills and exercise creativity on the other, to follow their passion!

What are the key highlights of the advice you would give to your teachers/ staff at the beginning of each session?

I often tell them, having taught myself, that we are blessed to be teachers and that we are responsible for making a difference in the lives of our students. This is both a privilege

and a challenge that must be lived up to.

“ Diversity must be nurtured in an education space to develop tolerance and open-mindedness ”

How would you groom teachers/ staff to become leaders of tomorrow? What kind of learning activities do teachers engage in for professional development?

In my journey, I have mentored 25 of my staff members into leadership positions as principals or heads of schools.

I have learnt that reflection, discussion, study and the capacity to face challenges can aid in supporting people to become the leaders that they are capable of being.

What are the key challenges that you go through as a Principal/ School Leader and how do you overcome those? Specifically, challenges faced by you due to the blend of students coming from different academic backgrounds.

Running a school effectively is complicated as it involves up to date knowledge of pedagogy, HR, administration, finance, operation, curriculum development etc. Maintaining quality in teaching methods and learning, as well as taking care of education facilities and administration is a tough task. You have to be broad and focused in your management. This is difficult but essential. You have to learn to turn off, and in my case to get away from the office.

It is important to be aware of equity for inclusion. When you walk into the classrooms here you will not be able to tell what kind of socio-economic background a student comes from. Policies and procedures, to extend additional support





for students who come from underprivileged backgrounds helps us maintain equity. The Academy helps in that regard. For example, all students need access to technology - notebooks, iPads etc. If a student does not have access to individual personal devices, these are supplied on an as-needs basis. Our financial aid can extend to the provision of shoes and uniforms if necessary.

An advice you would give to leaders of tomorrow?

- Be flexible
- Be calm
- Be professional in your approach
- Develop professional skills

“ Stewardship and service are the two most important values that must be instilled in students...we must ensure that we give back to the world what we have ”

What are the challenges faced by the school in terms of governance? How does the



Foundation help run the school?

We are extremely fortunate that the Aga Khan Academy Hyderabad is a member of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and as such has a unique vision and extraordinary mission. It also has a governance structure which facilitates development. To work for the AKDN has been a revelation for me and something I appreciate enormously.

How do you/ the school meet the current needs of students, considering the world has become so much smaller today?

As opposed to my school days, the classroom has become

a place of engagement and diversity today. Classrooms are now sustained by appropriate use of differentiated assessment and applied technology.

As a result of a much deeper understanding of how people learn, the teacher's role has become significantly more demanding requiring more expertise. Assessment for learning technology in the classroom or use of technology differentiated instruction and project-based learning, are all essential parts of a good modern teacher.

Good governance is important





to meet challenges that are so dynamic in nature. We try and make arrangements for the students to be exposed to the world. For example, we have had 50 different overseas universities visiting in the last few months. Exchange programs also help students learn and imbibe different cultures. Furthermore, we take students for trips within and outside India. This helps students to see and be part of the global space. These trips are structured, have an education purpose and must involve learning activities irrespective of being a trekking or a sports trip. It is not the requirement of a curriculum but a requirement of good quality education, I would say.

How is the school infrastructure and what are the latest tangible deliverables offered by the

school to meet the demands of students today?

The Academy is set in an extraordinary 100 acre campus with outstanding sports, arts and IT facilities designed to support learning. A good education demands a holistic approach, challenging and supporting students physically, intellectually and emotionally. Modern education demands familiarity and expertise in the use and the application of technology. At the Academy, we have a matrix one-to-one strategy that is supported by being a Microsoft Showcase School.

- Again, spaces matter. Students must move around the space to be able to engage in learning and be interested. This helps create an interesting learning environment which is important.
- Opportunities must be

provided in order to help people learn and be creative in their approach.

- Classrooms must be flexible.



The Academy blends with trends: creative learning for example, music, drama, fine arts have been shown to develop the skill of persistence, team work and personal confidence to a greater degree than anything else. These skills then impact academic results and life outcomes. All students should





be involved in the demands of such creative opportunities.

Diversity must be nurtured in an education space.

What are the key values that a school/ institute must instill in students?

Stewardship and service are the two most important values that must be instilled in students. We must do justice to what has been given to us. Again we must ensure that we give back to the world what we have. These must be nurtured through activities in schools.

How does the school deal with discipline and life beyond classrooms?

Some ways in which we maintain discipline would be:

- By defining clear policies and practices.
- Clear expectations
- Living up to expectations
- Kindness and treating individuals holistically.



tête-à-tête QUICK 7

MENTOR in conversation with Dr. Geoffrey Fisher

1. I would describe education as....
The future

2. What are the 3 leadership qualities for a dynamic principal in today's times?

- Focus
- Professionalism
- Care and kindness

3. What are the 3 key skills that teachers must have?

- A teacher must be
- Flexible
 - Calm
 - Professional

4. What are the three things that we in India must imbibe from the education space abroad?

- An education which is:
- About development of the student's future
 - About community
 - About tolerance

5. List three things in the Indian education system that can be shared with the rest of the world

- Value of family
- Value of respect
- Value of community

6. Your biggest learning from life has been...

Enjoy today as much as you anticipate tomorrow. Do not rush into things or into decisions likewise.

7. Life is the mother of learning! Your view?

Learning through experience is the best way to learn.





With an experience of about 37 years in the education space, Dr. Dolly Jaitly is currently serving as the Principal of VSPK International School, Delhi. She hails from a defence background and feels that 'life itself has been the greatest teacher.' However, as a sincere student of the education field, she chooses to seize every opportunity to enhance , envisage and educate herself. She has recently been awarded a certificate of appreciation from the University of Reading (U.K.) for the Principal Leadership Programme and in this article for MENTOR, Dr. Jaitly shares insights of her experiences as a school leader.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Dr. Dolly Jaitly

To lead people, walk beside them. As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence and when the best leader's work is done, the people say, 'We did it ourselves!'

- Lao Tsu, Chinese philosopher

Life is nothing but the sum total of learning experiences from cradle to grave. One who does not grow with times is often left behind in this monumental journey of dynamic existence. I have been a teacher for the longest time but choose to be a learner by choice and treat the educational panorama as my play field to gain lessons.

Education and school have traditionally been the hub of our communities not only for the wisdom and knowledge that they create for our present and future, but for the connections that they create amongst a community. There were times

when teachers were revered and respected for the work that they did with students, their efforts to connect with parents and involve them in the learning process of their child, nurturing intelligence and developing students as holistically developed individuals. However, I feel that, "it takes an entire community", to nurture and develop students who would be leaders of tomorrow.

As an educational leader, it is most important to bring a community together to share leadership in many different avenues. In a quote from Tom Peters, he states that "leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders." In a school community, this starts at the top most level in working with others to develop their leadership in every position and level for the members involved.

Strength Based Focus

Every teacher has her positives. By focusing on the strength of teachers, you show that you value their expertise first, before you look to help them develop in other areas. This strength-based focus helps to build a relationship between the principal and each individual teacher, pushing them to be better every day. When the leader of an organization has this belief and proves it through actions, it trickles down to the teachers and then to the students in the classroom. The more experience I gain in leadership, the more I see that effective teachers are effective





leaders, and have this same strength-based approach with their students. If we have a community that focuses on building leadership in all areas, we are more likely to be successful within our vision.

“ I strongly recommend a holistic approach to empower and enrich our next generation to meet the challenges of life with enhanced life skill education ”

Flexibility and Adaptation

Through this value on developing leadership, our schools are more open not only to navigate but to lead change as well. As society continues to change, schools need to adapt to best serve our students for their future as well as their present. Those that are willing to adapt and learn from change now, will be the ones that are most likely to be successful in the future. Today, we see new and different jobs being created in our world. Many old and accepted jobs that dominated the vision of parents and students are losing sheen and are becoming irrelevant. Therefore, amidst this era of changing scenarios, we should focus on developing the

next generation of entrepreneurs in schools itself. This is often created by instilling a sense of “intrapreneurial spirit” within educators that are always looking to develop and further the education as the vehicle of change. While we look and build on what has worked in the past, we must also continuously look forward and review the gap between the curriculum and the requirements of the community.

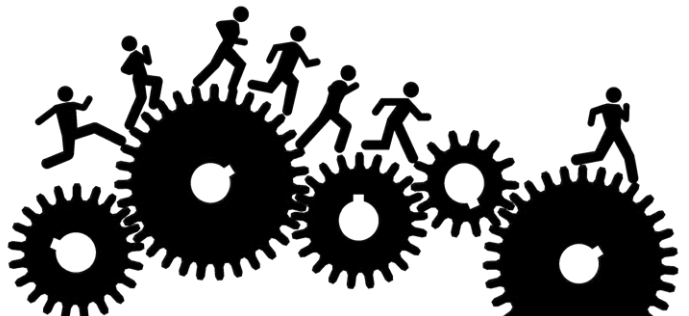
Transparency and Communication

One of those changes in our world is a shift to an open and transparent environment. As an administrator, I have the opportunity to become better by continuously being able to visit classrooms and see what the most effective teachers do. Peers do not have this same opportunity because of our physical environment and over busy schedule at work place. Through the use of different technologies such as smart class internet etc, we open up our

classrooms to other educators not only in our own schools, but to schools around the world to collaborate with them and get valuable feedback. As I always focus on “what is best for kids”, it is crucial that we look not only to help our own students, but how we can help other students from around the globe as well. We must ensure that we create a culture of sharing within our own community to learn from others around the world, as well as within our own community. The most innovative environments outside of school tap into the “wisdom of the room” and bring in different voices to continuously learn and grow; schools must do the same.

Parents- Equal Stakeholders

To be successful, people must have a purpose within our education organization. This includes parents who are a great untapped resource within our own communities. We can no longer have children going home and being asked





the question, “what did you learn today?”, and responding with, “nothing.” By opening the doors to our classrooms through both physical and virtual environments, we have the opportunity to change the conversation at home. Parents are able to be actively involved in the process of learning, leading to a higher opportunity for success of each child. The more we involve parents in this process at home, the more likely it is for students to be successful in school, and beyond. This community support is imperative.

Mutual Respect

Effective school leadership is transcended through qualities that enable an individual to step to the forefront of a situation and take command by overseeing, delegating, and providing guidance. As a school leader, one should desire to be the kind of person that people trust and respect, but that does not come through a title of being a principal alone. It is something that one earns with time and hard work. If you expect to gain the respect of teachers, students, staff, etc., you have to learn to give respect first.

Servitude

It is important for a leader to have an attitude of servitude. This does not mean that you allow people to step all over you or do their job, but you make yourself



readily available to help people out should the need arise. By doing this, you set up a pathway for success because the people you oversee are more likely to accept changes, solutions, and advice when they emulate senior leaders.



amidst this era of changing scenarios, we should focus on developing the next generation of entrepreneurs in schools itself

Decision making can be tough

As a school leader, it is also crucial for you to be prepared to make tough decisions that go against the grain. There are going to be times when it is necessary to make these types of decisions. You have a responsibility to make choices

based upon what is best for your students. It is important to realize that you will step on people’s toes and that some may be angry with you. Understand that if it is best for the students, then you have a rational reason for making those decisions. When making a tough decision, have confidence that you have earned enough respect that the majority of your decisions are not questioned. However, as a leader, you should be prepared to explain a decision if it has the best interest of your students in mind.

In summary, building relationships, developing leadership, and focusing on school as the “hub” of our community, would help in creating an environment where our students are building a bright future both today and tomorrow. By looking at what worked in the past while also looking in developing our future, our community is more likely to be able to come together to create the schools our kids need. Therefore, I strongly recommend a holistic approach to empower and enrich our next generation to meet the challenges of life with enhanced life skill education so that they may grow into global citizens.

Image Courtesy:
www.whistlermulticulturalnetwork.com
www.communityactionderby.org.uk
www.enrol.australianonlinecourses.com
www.openexpo.es





SAYING 'NO' TO CHILDREN

Ms. Jaya Narayanan Pisharoty

Ms. Jaya Narayanan Pisharoty earned an M.Phil (in E.L.T & Linguistics) from Pondicherry Central University. She has taught in ICSE and CBSE schools for 25 years now. Author of a popular grammar text book series, she conducts classes for English teachers in many schools. She has adapted fairy tales into full length plays for Kindergarten schools. She is the resource person for prestigious publishing houses. She has authored numerous articles on education. Jaya is a freelance reviewer for the Friday Review magazine of The Hindu. Currently serving as the Principal of Ahalia Public School, Palakkad, Ms. Pisharoty shares her views on how to deal with unnatural requests from children.

A recent WhatsApp message doing the rounds is as follows: 'My kids message me 'Plz' which is shorter than 'Please'. I reply 'No' which is shorter than 'Yes'.

This message must have made many smile. But there is a lot behind it which is no laughing matter. A burning topic among educators today is the apparent inability of parents to use this word and of children to accept it.

Delving Deeper

Psychologists have many theories to offer on the subject, ranging from 'it is psychologically damaging to deny something to a child' to 'it is psychologically damaging to indulge a child.' There is probably some truth in both statements. Children are with us educators for up to 8 hours a day. What we say and do extends beyond those hours into various homes and to society as a whole. In all these interactions, there are three players, two visible and a third, invisible, but whose presence is always felt. They are the teacher

and the child and of course, the 'invisible' player is the parent. The psychologist is not present in this scenario. Besides, the child has not been labeled 'problem child' and neatly packed off for counselling. So on a daily basis, the teacher interacts with the child in 'normal situations', without the support of trained experts. When we are expected to take care of the child in daily situations, it is useful to understand the transactions between an adult and a child and empower ourselves.

Teachers and school authorities react with irritation and lack of sympathy to this ubiquitous problem. They cannot be blamed. With 40 students in the class demanding/expecting special treatment, teachers are bound to feel the pressure. Frequent phone calls and visits by complaining parents add to this problem. In these days of shrinking nuclear families and consequent insecurities, this trend is only likely to get worse. It is worth looking at this issue and the psychological factors involved.

Firstly, why does a parent find it difficult to say NO to a child? I wish the answer were a simple one, 's/he loves it and wants it to be happy.' Those who have children or interact with them know that this is not the case. I would like to propose that the main reason why a parent cannot say NO to a child is lack of will. The child is going to protest and the parent does





not have the energy, time or willpower to encounter it. When a child makes a reasonable request or demand, it is natural that we adults consider it with the respect and attention it deserves and either gratify it or express regret in a polite and civilized way. Just as we would offer an explanation to an adult, we owe the child one too. The same is applicable to teachers.

Treating a child with respect is essential for a healthy relationship. If we hear out the child and understand the demand, we can engage in a meaningful dialogue with him/her. An outright NO can be as harmful as an immediate YES. If we are able to explain why something cannot be bought or given at that time, or in future, the child is likely to understand. It is actually useful to make an inventory of wishes that can or cannot be fulfilled. If this list is explained and shared with the child, things will be easier. Negotiations on how the demand can be adjusted so that it becomes a reasonable one, are also useful. To illustrate, if a teenager with a newly earned driving license wants to go on a long drive alone, understandably, there will be parental anxiety, but a deal can be struck whereby s/he can be

given the wheel on a family trip or on a short trip to the grocery store. That becomes a modified response, neither an outright yes nor a no.

If we regard children as independent entities who have their own place in the world, we will see that they need to be respected and given their freedom. This attitude can guide our actions, as early as possible. Feeding an infant on demand must lead to letting a teenager decide the quantity of food he requires. This is not to be mistaken for a complete lack of regard for nutritional needs. Once again, negotiations and discussion of what food is both tasty and nutritious can ease the tension that so many parents face. However, the sad fact that is few parents have the time to spend on such transactions with their children. Schools can bring in clarity and awareness on this issue, thus empowering parents.

Collaborating with Parents

Teachers and Principals can play a meaningful role, by conducting awareness classes and orientation programmes for parents. As they say, parenting is one vocation which comes without any manual and every day, people gleefully start on it without any training

whatsoever. If KG parents can be made aware of the concept of 'consequences', they will be empowered on their challenging task. It will be useful for the parent to draw up a list (as s/he goes along) of 'misdeeds' that cannot be condoned. The KG teacher can draw up a similar list and share it with the parent. This habit can be cultivated with the growing years and changing nature of 'offences'.

Once the list is in place, if a child commits a grave mistake such as hurting someone or taking someone's things, s/he will have to face the consequences. This should rather be deprivation of favourite activities or objects rather than a punishment being awarded. Again, our action has to be explained to the child with utmost patience and kindness, not to mention, firmness.

The KG teacher would do well to list out 'dos and don'ts' in the early days after the children have settled into their new environment. These rules can be drawn up with the support of the Principal and shared with the parents. If the ground rules are laid before transgressions are committed it is easier to communicate them in a non-confrontational manner. When a child commits one, the teacher must explain to the child which rule has been broken and what the consequences will be. A clear report can be submitted to the Principal to keep him/her in the picture. If there is transparency and a sense of co-operation between the various players in this transaction, Principals will find it easier to take the parents along. Principals and teachers must take care to be completely unprejudiced in their dealings with children and their parents. Not only should the teacher be impartial, s/he should take care to be seen



as such too. An action leads to certain previously explained and accepted consequences. This should follow as naturally as night follows day, this is what children and parents should be made to understand. If Principals introduce such a scheme in their schools, their jobs will be considerably easier.

Challenges along the way

It is common knowledge that during teenage years, the child will rebel. During these years, it is wise to pick our fights or the home/school will turn into a battleground. Once again, a 'never-ever-do' list will come in handy. Teenagers have a natural sense of justice and it is best to appeal to that sense. In high school classes, once the rules are in place, when a transgression occurs, it must be made public (depending on the nature of the transgression, of course) and the 'consequences' must be declared in class. Acceptance will be higher then. When the child understands the situation, he is less likely to complain at home and parents are more likely to accept the situation. In the case of teenagers, lesser transgressions are best ignored.

Negotiations and discussions do not mean that we are lesser beings. Teachers do not have to feel that they are demeaning themselves in this way. 'Transaction' can be a valuable lesson for children on the nature of the real world they will have to face eventually. They will also learn to treat others around them, including their parents and teachers, in a similar manner. A school can then be a place for value-based learning. A child can learn to view adults differently. Rather than being seen as symbols of control, adults can be recognized for what they actually are,

facilitators of their children's success. Schools can play an important role in inculcating this value.

This system of facing 'consequences' has a sting in its tail. Parents and teachers will then have to mind their own 'p's and 'q's !! If a father jumps a red light, he will have to face the consequences just as a teacher will be fined for dumping waste in a public place. Teachers and parents will have to develop the moral fibre for enforcing such rules, together. Sadly, we heedlessly break rules and say a categorical NO when a child asks for a toy!

Another fact about the 'outright NO' is that the child will then refrain only at that moment. On the other hand, if s/he is empowered with the knowledge of what the act entails and its consequences, it is a guarantee for his future actions too. When children fly the nest, or leave school for university education, we can be a little less worried for their continued safety. Empowerment is the key.

Why does a teacher find it so irksome when a parent indulges a child?

Is it because the child then develops a similar expectation from all others around? Teachers find it impossible to meet that expectation and there is

unhappiness related to that. If teachers take the parents along and are able to convince them that they are all in it together and that they share a common goal of the child's welfare, there will be a change in the present scenario where the parent and teacher are polarized and sometimes come to symbolize 'the good' and 'the bad.' When a child leaves its mother's womb, there is a traumatic severance of ties. In a lesser way, ties are severed when a child leaves home for college or work. These are recognized moves with an understanding of the pain it brings to both the parent and the child.

In between these two extremes there is one more painful separation, when a child gets off the mother's lap and walks into school. A talk with the parents at the time of school admission will reveal all the hidden fears and anxieties. Empowered with a better understanding of what the parents' vision for their child is, the teacher can embark on that adventure called school education. If a child texts "plz", we can type a longer message, "call me" or "let's talk." A YES or a NO may be a short response, but it is not a simple one.

Image Courtesy:
www.alysonschafer.com | www.3.bp.blogspot.com | www.media.npr.org | www.r.ddmcdn.com | www.judybanfield.com | www.consciouscommunityinc.org | www.icjs.org | www.ctb.ku.edu | www.gettingsmart.com





SCHOOL DESIGN

Ms. Meghana Dutta

Ms. Meghana Dutta is a founding partner of the firm Studio Decode, an innovative architectural design firm based out of Bengaluru. She brings environmental consciousness into design of her projects. At Studio Decode, she leads the firm's initiatives in research and implementation for their sustainable efforts. She has delivered several lectures in conventions and institutions around the country. In this article for MENTOR, she shares her vision for effective school design and structure aiding the learning environment.

DESIGN = PERFORMANCE, PROGRESS & HEALTH

'The process of imparting education is more important and not the physicality of the space in which it is imparted' is how the traditional rationale for school design has been. Many schools excelled in perfecting this process but research showed that it was not enough for the wholesome development of a child to an adult. As schools evolved and processes of imparting adopted more scientific methods to analyze the impact of these processes, it led to the realization that well designed spaces augmented the experience of education and had a positive impact on a child's psyche and development.

A building is not just an enclosure, but the concrete translation of the vision and the aspirations of the School. A well designed campus with the right balance of built & open spaces can inspire, energize and have many positive influences on a child. The architecture of an educational facility becomes an interface as well as an extension of the kind of education the facility will be known for.

Few of the accepted Key Performance Indicators(KPI) for a School are

- Facilities
- Student's well-being
- Health and Safety
- Community Engagement
- Quality of Education
- Curriculum and Extracurricular activities
- Fees and Financial Management of School
- Cultural Identity

Design is Key

Design has a direct impact on many of the performance indicators listed above. In the times we live in, there is a global perspective to how we interpret culture and tradition. With a 'world is flat' phenomenon it is important that an educational building performs as a receptacle for contemporary ideas yet reflect a sense of tradition and culture endemic to the DNA of a geographical location. Hence, architects are trying to contemporize traditional ideas and design schools with a new language





which allows the school to be the receptacle of change and progress. Focal elements and insertions at various points can sensitize an end user to the cultural underpinnings and identity of a society.

Innovation and encouraging students to think outside the box is of key importance to any school. The language adopted for the built elements of a school building, should also encourage curiosity, innovation and critical thinking of the world around them. Designs which allow spaces to transform into multi-functional spaces is critical. For example, a corridor is not just a space to traverse from one classroom to another, but should be envisioned as a significant space where young minds exchange ideas, foster conversations which may lead to out of the box thinking.

With respect to student health and safety, architecture plays an important role. For instance, with regards to safety, areas which are only artificially lit and have minimal visual connection with the common spaces, are areas that will be prone to encourage mischief amongst students. With regards to student health, maintaining the minimum standards of indoor air quality in the classrooms is key to

ensure children don't fall sick. Ensuring good natural daylight and natural ventilation uplifts the spirit of the children.



Few of the key elements which we think are critical for successful design of a school are listed as Salient Design Features below.

Salient Design Features

1. Planning Principles

Schools should have clarity in circulation and built spaces needs to be made easily accessible along circulation spines. Classrooms and circulation spaces dominate the program of a school and hence becomes the focus of our architectural attention. The alignment of the classrooms to maximize north light and the position of the long corridors in the front to minimize exposure to southern heat can make it a dominant canvas for expression.

Clear definition of spaces is an important criterion for privacy and maintenance.

2. Movement and Progression

The design can be conceptualized and developed around these two elements. The education process as visualized by us is in a state of flux and movement. The building can be conceived to be dynamic in form so as to induce a sense of movement. The master plan can be conceptualized so as to have the different school blocks placed in accordance to the hierarchy of the education system.

The form of the building is representational of an idea where the corridor is the longest single architectural element of the building and how the building navigates around the corridors reflects the symbolic progressive movement within the school. The sense of movement can be brought about by the dynamism of the form, the orientation of the perforations in the walls, railing designs, the columns, the staircase and various other details.

3. Playfulness

The school needs to invoke a sense of intrigue through the geometry and induce the child to explore the various spaces in the building as well as within the



classrooms. Fenestrations in the classrooms should be designed with varying size and types. One can serve as a step out balcony at a child's height and another can serve as a ledge to sit. Vision glazing should be provided at both the child's and adults level. The child should be able to step in and out between the built and unbuilt spaces with ease through the perforations in the building envelope.

4. Corridor

The corridor is a significant element which is necessary in the design of any school. The intent should be to move away from the conventional system of corridors which are long, monotonous and lack a sense of intrigue as well as playfulness.

We propose that the corridor be designed to continuously change in dimensions in all three axes, unfolding as a series of spaces with varying purposes and functions. The idea is to envision the corridor as a space where small groups of congregation can happen by chance, and as a space which entices a child to move forward and explore the unknown beyond.

5. Framing of Views

It is absolutely imperative for us to understand the surroundings of the site and capture it as visual frames. The views from the corridors, classrooms & corners of the building should be framed. Framing of views along the corridor can psychologically reduce the experience of the travel length of the corridor.

A sustainable approach is equally important to enhance the quality of spaces for an Institution.

Sustainable Building Principles

1. Orientation

Building should preferably be oriented in the east-west axis so as to ensure all classrooms get daylight from the northern and diffused light from the southern facades. For a completely naturally ventilated building the east west orientation can be adopted so as to reduce the heat gain and subsequent cooling required. If an east west orientation is not possible then north light skylights can be provided to bring in north light in the classrooms.

2. Day lighting and ventilation

Windows of varying sizes can be explored on the northern wall to provide for ample daylight. Glazing should be at child's level and at an adult's level. Each classroom should also be provided with clerestory glazing where possible. The combination of daylight glazing and vision glazing gives ample lighting for each classroom and thus reduces the use of artificial light. Clerestory openings also provide for outlet of stack effect and circulation in the classrooms. Windows should be provided on south and north walls of each classroom to ensure adequate cross ventilation.

3. Regional Materials

As a responsible design practice we recommend to maximize use of regional materials. A conscious effort should be made to ensure that

most of the materials used have been sourced within 500 kilometers radius so as to reduce transportation distances of materials and in turn reduce consumption of fossil fuel.

4. Reduced Site Disturbance

Effort to minimize disturbing the contours as well as the existing landscape should be made. Open spaces between buildings should be maximized to ensure adequate lighting and ventilation to all buildings.

To conclude the role of design in the architecture of schools should not be underestimated. Schools are communities where the minds of the next generations are shaped. This is where they learn values and ethics. Various studies have shown that quality of space can improve the learning and progress of students by 10 to 15 percent. They not only enable the student's performance to be bettered, but also enable the teachers to perform better.

It is not enough to design a building which provides natural light and ventilation. The architecture of the school most importantly should invoke a sense of belonging, a sense of pride, inspire and motivate and make the child want to come back to inhabit these spaces day after day!

Image Courtesy: visionopticalbillings.com | isightinfo.com | kidsumers.ca





THE PROFOUND EFFECT OF HANDWRITING ON THE BRAIN

Ms. Mary E. Pearce

Does handwriting seem to be an uninteresting and useless subject in our present day? The subject of handwriting has actually become controversial! Should we teach cursive or manuscript? Should we teach handwriting at all, since we have computers? Can we find a solution to all this, and could research help us a bit?

What if I told you that your handwriting affects how you learn, think and behave? Could you believe that your pencil hold can make you love or hate writing? Or that generous handwriting practice will build you a better brain? Brain science is uncovering amazing secrets of the hand-brain connection.

Before you toss out handwriting, ask yourself how you got your job and how the next generation will get theirs? You needed to fill out a job application! You will surely be judged by your potential employer on your neatness! It isn't just employers. Studies say that teachers tend to give poor marks to students with poor handwriting. Do you now think maybe handwriting is important?

This undervalued skill is part of all of our lives- no matter how many computers and smart phones we have. We will always write notes and fill out documents. Without handwriting we are not truly literate. Computers will never

replace handwriting because, more importantly, handwriting can now be proven to have a profound impact on our brains! Education experts say:

Long before modern brain imaging, Dr. Montessori said, "The hand builds the brain." And since babyhood, we have all enjoyed doing things with our hands. There are many skilled things we can do with our hands, some more difficult than others. How does handwriting rate a difficult or easy skill? Dr. M. Levine, a learning disorders expert says of handwriting, "it is one of the most complex activities in which a child is asked to engage." He adds further; "writing is one of the largest orchestras a kid has to conduct." The act of handwriting is so complex, and technically precise, that it is a formidable learning task.

Explicit Handwriting

We define 'handwriting'



Ms. Mary E. Pearce is a master trainer and support materials developer for Global Classroom Private Limited(GCPL) since 2013. She presents workshops for teachers, principals and school owners. She travels frequently throughout India to train teachers in GCPL curriculum. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (B.A.I.S.) 2012, from Western Governors University, Salt Lake City, Utah. For 25 years in the USA, Mary home schooled her nine children (preprimary to 12). Apart from the basic curriculum children were taught skills like sewing, cooking, gardening, carpentry and canning. In this article for MENTOR, Ms. Pearce delineates the effect of holding a pencil and the importance of handwriting and how it must be corrected in school children.





the pencil needs to be close to parallel with the lower half of the index finger. The key principal is a relaxed, loose hold. The wrong pencil grip clearly shows too much pressure being put on the pencil, which inverts the first joint on the index finger. I have travelled India extensively and see the terribly strained hands of children and adults who use this grip.

“ Explicit handwriting programs give quantity and quality instruction, until children write ‘automatically.’ ”

Three evidences that handwriting has a huge impact on our brains

History

Throughout history, most people were illiterate except for a special class called ‘scribes.’ They held high positions alongside rulers and business people. They helped those people retain power, gain wealth and run countries. The first people known to have widespread literacy were the Jewish people. They are credited with the first true alphabet in the world. Moses (circa 1500 BC) received the Ten Commandments from God, and God ordered the people to write those laws down for their children to remember. They have always been considered a very intelligent people group. Also, the early American colonies imitated these principles. The result at that time was nearly 100% literacy without government schools. Handwriting has built productive, prosperous societies.

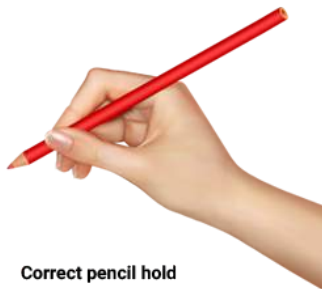
as: “manual writing, taught intensively as a technically precise skill.” This training is called “explicit handwriting.” Explicit handwriting programs give quantity and quality instruction, until children write ‘automatically.’ Automatic means they can do it without conscious control or ‘without thinking.’ Children in the past practiced rows and rows of circles (running ovals) and up and down lines (push/pulls) to begin this process. Over time, this produced “kinetic melodies” synchronizing all the muscles to make each letter. If you are over 50 years old, you probably had this training. Because full mastery takes plenty of time and practice, this skill tends to be pushed out of busy school schedules.

pencil hold. Despite much mis-information, the correct pencil hold allows the pencil to rest on the third (uppermost) section of your index finger. Another “legal” hold places the pencil between the index and middle fingers, while the thumb holds it in place. This is the favorite brush and pen hold of artists. By the way, if you want children to enjoy handwriting, do not force them to write with your hand on theirs. Show patterns and let them try it. (Image: pencil holds) Take a look at Narendra Modi’s position of his pen and paper. This shows the correct training he received in school. His pencil grip is ideal! And the right-handed person should turn their paper at a right angle to their body. So the left-handers should tilt the paper to the left.

Correct Pencil Holds

Let us talk about the correct

The two methods just mentioned are correct pencil holds because





Brain Research (How the Brain is Wired)

Handwriting's amazing ability to change the brain is now inescapable given modern neuro-imaging. We know that the movements of muscles on our right side are wired to the left brain. The left side of our body is likewise cross-wired. We have also learned that the best functioning brain (like Einstein's) have many fibers travelling through the corpus callosum, connecting the two hemispheres.

An amazing ¼ of your motor cortex is dedicated to your hand, so handwriting training has great potential to enlarge your left hemisphere. Since the right hand wires the left side of the brain, explicit handwriting produces a healthy 'lopsided brain' which is a thinking brain. Most children are right handed and need a larger left brain to develop language skill. But is this the only reason why a larger left brain is important to us?

Before we answer that, let us consider left-handed people. I am often asked this question during my presentations on handwriting in India. If right-handed people build a larger left brain, what about left-handed people? Left-handed people have special thinking capabilities in both sides of the brain. They are God's gift to us all. Do not ever try to change their handwriting hand! They are very creative people and often have perfect pitch and perfect aim (in hitting a target). Left-handers are very creative people!

Your logical, language-based left brain is vital to produce logical thinking. The left brain should be dominant over the emotional/intuitive right brain, so it must be larger. Only then can the right brain's ideas be

expressed in logical ways such as through the language of the hand (handwriting). Since the left hemisphere tempers the right hemisphere, any skill that efficiently develops (enlarges) the left side is of great importance in developing a stable mind.

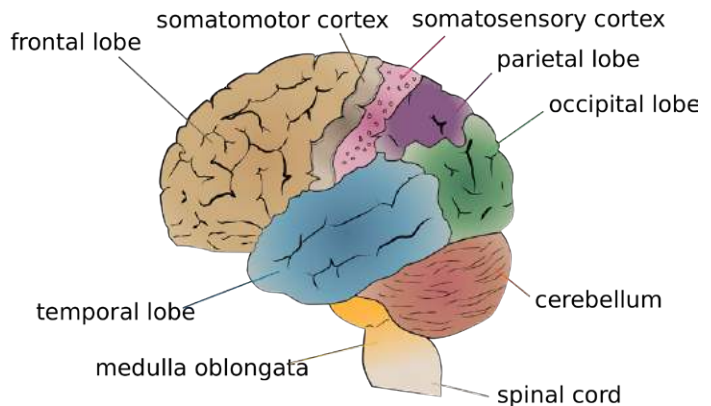
“ Handwriting's amazing ability to change the brain is now inescapable given modern neuro-imaging ”

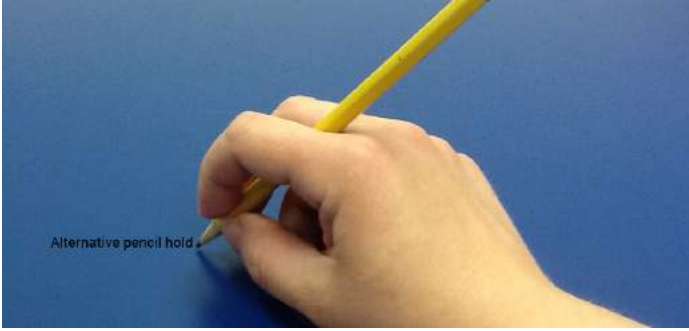
Daniel Goleman, a psychologist and author on 'emotional intelligence,' notes that if a person cannot pay attention, they cannot think clearly. When emotions (right brain) overwhelm our concentration, we lose the ability to focus on the task at hand. He says, "there is no psychological skill more fundamental than resisting impulse." And impulses cannot be resisted without left brain dominance. That is the meaning of a 'healthy, stable, self-controlled brain.' For instance, learning disabled children are often impulsive and have trouble sitting still and paying attention.

The Attention Loop- Why it must be built

Can you learn anything if you do not pay attention? Obviously, no! This is the problem for many young children in school. Have you noticed that many little boys cannot pay attention easily? Handwriting is an art form, and little boys, generally, are more energetic and not as interested in art as little girls. They want to be active. This is why they need handwriting practice time in school. Girls tend to build their brains more readily, because they choose to do things with their hands, like drawing or writing.

So what is the attention loop? It is a literal human nerve connection (wire) that we build in a circular pattern. It begins in our logical left brain (frontal lobes) and goes to our emotional area (amygdala) where flight or fright responses are decided. Next it runs to the place where we store things we have learned to the 'automatic' level (cerebellum), then back to the frontal lobe. This 'wire' is built by hand movement as we learn handwriting so well that we can do it without thinking (automatic). This connection 'cools off', the child's impulsiveness and provides a calming effect on behavior. That





The obvious conclusion is that all children, whether they have problems with letter shaping, or building logical sentences, or inattentiveness, or learning disabilities can benefit from proper handwriting training. Handwriting affects all areas of the child's present and future life. The sad reality is that even well-meaning special education teachers do not study the research on this topic. The solutions are clear: children who have any of these problems need a supplemental handwriting program of 10-15 min/day for several months to see improvement. Ideally, all children should have an explicit handwriting program from preschool days up to at least class 1 or 2. The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it." As educators, we need to train children in this critical skill which will profit them for a lifetime. Handwriting must be given its rightful place as part of the foundation of a civilized society. It is one of the three basic skills of education; reading, writing and arithmetic. Children need this opportunity to reach their potential as they develop capable, self-controlled, intelligent minds for their future and ours.

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is because this 'loop' connects the emotional brain to the logical brain.

This loop helps us to focus our mental energies, so we can finish what we start. Impulsiveness and poor attention span go hand in hand. Have you noticed the child with attention problems who seems to be 'always getting into trouble,' looking for things to distract themselves? These children have not practiced their handwriting enough to have built this vital attention loop.

Remedial Studies

In remedial handwriting studies, children who had trouble focusing on forming letters and words tend to forget what they started to write about. This is because they are switching back and forth from 'motor skills' to 'ideas and concepts.' Learning handwriting to automatic solves this problem since it frees them from thinking about letter formation.

In remedial studies, children were given explicit handwriting teaching for at least a month.

All of these children showed improvement in writing skills, efficiency of mind/hand coordination, attention span, self-control, and school work. Researchers concluded that lack of explicit handwriting instruction was causing handwriting deficits and other issues like learning disabilities. Interestingly, in the late 1950s in the USA, learning disabilities rose just as explicit handwriting programs started to disappear. Handwriting is one of the most complex skills humans can acquire. The stimulation that handwriting brings to the brain is irreplaceable and crucial in the molding of the thinking, self-controlled brain. Handwriting worldwide is being given less and less time in school syllabuses. Everywhere, children are building strong right (impulsive) brains with activities such as TV, video games and ipads. They are moving quickly away from a self-controlled mind and fail to build the 'attention loop' they need for the school environment- and learning in general.

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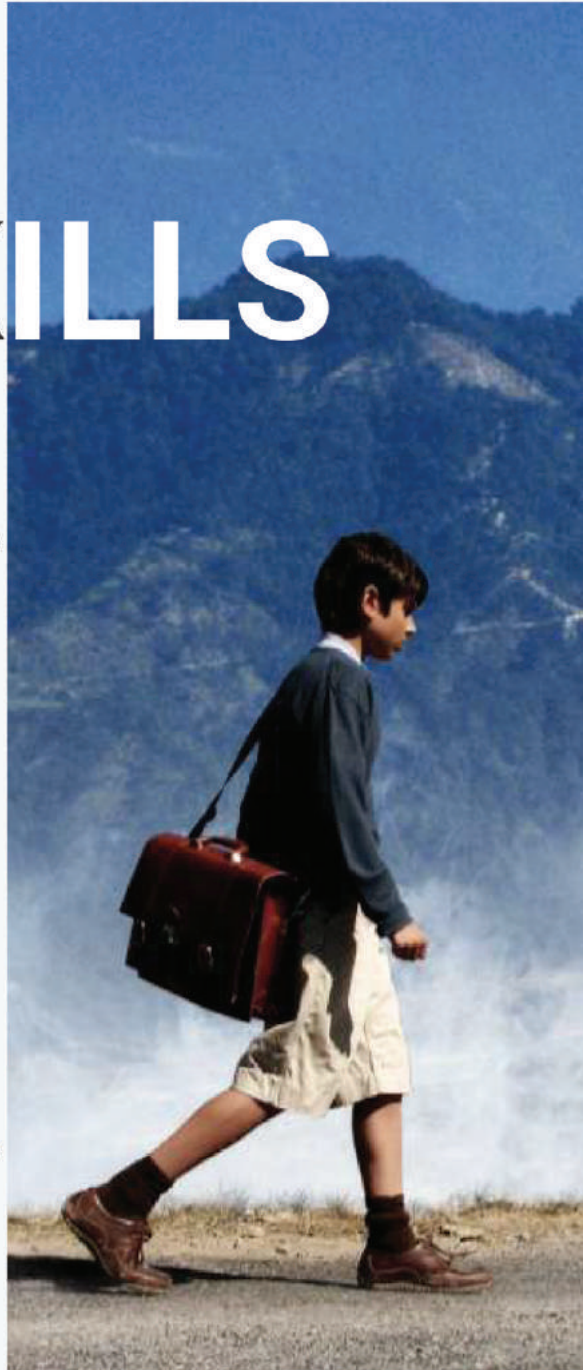
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