

Chembur Workshop

This was a 5 day workshop on “Creativity” we conducted in seventies. My friend Dr. Harendranath (Hari) was the initiator. It was in a school for children in 9th and 10th classes. Initially we showed some slides, talked about how important was to observe. Children did some visual geometric puzzles. A theater session was held in which they enacted letter forms. Children were enjoying the workshop.

A significant learning happened with one incident. There were two boys in the class who were unable to solve the math puzzles. They did not show much of enthusiasm. They dressed rather carelessly. They will come late to the class. When they come, the whole class used to laugh. They seemed to enjoy this positioning.. We had an open discussion on ‘what is discipline?’. Children were vocal. Question of ‘wearing uniform’ came up. Some students pointed out that it brings in social equality among students. All this didn’t seem to affect the two kids who looked like coming from rich families. But something interesting happened on the 3rd day. We had asked the children 'to draw fear'. Children were little puzzled as they had not faced such an abstract theme to draw earlier. Nevertheless they drew with zeal using colour crayons and pencils.. We put up all the paintings they made on the wall. Two of the paintings were way above the others in their expression. We had discussion session on them. 'We all know 'fear' as we can feel inside. But the challenge is to draw or paint what we can't see. These two paintings (which were abstract) are the best!', we said.

The paintings happened to be drawn by the very 'two uninterested-boys'. Next morning was a surprise. Both the boys were well dressed with proper shoes, and tied up laces. They were before time. Their whole performance changed. They got their ‘Confidence’. They realized they were also 'good and no less than' others..

How important it is, to know that you are talented!

I believe this often happens in schools. Many children may have different talent based on their inclination. Howard Gardener has brought out this fact with his important research on ‘Multiple Intelligences’. Our schools as well as our Society in general seem to ignore this fact. Once children are recognized in their talent the confidence level and self esteem goes up, which helps to perform better in subjects which they had difficulty earlier.

We seem to be giving too much importance to the left brain traits like verbal, logical and Mathematical intelligences, down playing right brain traits like Drawing, Painting, Singing, Dancing etc.,.

Another significant feature of that workshop was the visit to “workshop for blind” in Dadar. In the afternoon session we arranged a Bus and took all the children to Dadar workshop. In the Class we discussed how we are often blind to many things which people who cannot see are not. We also explained that current term to use is ‘visually impaired’.. We visited the wonderful workshop where many people were working on machines though they could not see. We called out the inmates and introduced ourselves . The task for children was to meet a visually impaired person and make friends. We paired each child with an inmate In less than 10 minutes they all returned. My friend Hari asked “what happened?” Children said we

met so and so. His name is We said. "Look he or she is your friend. Take your time, sit and chit-chat for half an hour and come back."

All the children went back to meet their partners. After half an hour we had to call them back saying "Time is up" children were very excited. We went back to chembur and had a discussion. One of the children said, "You know sunil's favorite is also 'Shastri'". This was the time the cricket player Shastri was leading Indian team in Australia and had hit six sixes in one over!. The meeting helped the children to see the persons without eyes as normal people. We generally tend to develop a fear of meeting and talking to disabled people as normal friends. Children next day, on their own designed and made greeting cards for their new friends and all of them had incorporated 'touch and smell' in the cards which turned out to be very creative! They said they will send them for the new year as the dates were near. It was very touching.

How an unusual experience can bring-in a flow of creativity, changing the very perception of the world around!

The 5 days workshop went very well. We thought that the children had changed to think differently and pursue their thinking on their own. In the evening session got little extended. Some children came for permission to leave early. We asked the reason. To our shock we came to know that they were attending a coaching class which prepares them for I.I.T. entrance examination (JEE).
