

Why children should not be a Sink for our Sermons?

For long, we have dealt with children as a sink for our sermons. No matter what, no matter where, adults have a habit of advising them, often censuring their behaviour and sometimes chiding them for their playfulness. Children understand that and learn to play games with us. They recall that when they were infants, they were rewarded for making similar faces as adults made. If they reciprocated a smile, they were often hugged, else, had to hear taunts even at that age. They were tickled to stick a smile on their face even if they did not feel like it. They know how this world rewards conformity and copying, imitation and compliance.

It is not surprising that the same children sometimes carry these learnings into their adulthood. However, as is well known, Honey Bee Network has been trying to tap their creativity and innovative potential as a part of national inclusive innovation system. On Nov 19, Dr A P J Abdul Kalam will recognise such 30 children selected out of 27,000 children



at Ignite Function organised by the National Innovation Foundation at IIMA. We would witness that children are not only impatient, curious, empathetic but also much more creative than many adults. Many of us have known about the problems of unmet social needs and we have tried to comment on them, blame government or companies for not doing enough but seldom have we tried to solve them. Children don't want to live with problems unsolved for too long. They want to see solutions here and now. That is a very redeeming feature of our times. While we learned to live with problems unsolved indefinitely, children don't want to do it, we are entering a very interesting, optimistic and promising period of human history.

But then who are the biggest enemy of the creativity of children? Parents and Teachers. Look at any children's science congress, more than 90, if not 99 per cent projects are designed, conceived and delivered by parents and/or teachers. Children, often like a parrot, regurgitate the script. Is that the best way to bring out the creativity of our children? Should we teach children at an early age that it is moral and normal behaviour to claim somebody else's ideas (even if they are one's parents and teachers) as one's own? Then ministers of education at the centre and the state levels

complain that we don't have much original research or innovations in our country. The planners don't realise that they have worked hard to bring up our children on the diet of thoughtless imitation and unacknowledged copying.

What do we do then to remedy the situation? We should as parent, teachers, organisers of science congresses, district science exhibitions and other such melas decide not to encourage teacher and parent led experiments, demonstrations, models, etc. India must put a stop to this institutionalised charade. We will see in one year enormous gains in the unfolding creativity and innovativeness of children's thinking and acting potential. If teachers' creativity is needed to be expressed (I agree, it needs to be given a chance to express itself), then let us do it under their own name, not in the name of their students.

Parents must let children struggle, even if they cry for help, as they must be forced to think on their own and do their projects their way. There are a large number of companies set up by young engineers and also others who sell projects to children. Everybody in the education system knows about them. SRISTI started techpedia.in mainly to promote originality among tech students and link them with the unsolved problems of society, grassroots innovators and small entrepreneurs. Should we not upload children projects also online? How will they do what has been done already? How will they claim something as their own when somebody else might have already put the same idea up on the web, say creativechildren.in

"Children don't have to be taught morals", said my grandfather, who was a monk, "They observe you all the time". Our conduct is the material of their ethics class. Once we tell them that it is fine to present the models made by parents and teachers as their own, they have learned a lesson in morality. I hope that this will trigger a debate among organisers of childrens' science congresses in the country in different states and at the national level. It may also make those teachers who really want to bring out the best out of their students to reflect on their unwitting surrender to the ones who cut corners. I receive mails from children from many countries who are trying to develop a project on a specific idea. I wish we encourage our children to explore unknown territories, paths untraversed, goals unmet!

It is time that India decides to build upon a historic opportunity offered by impatient, empathetic and socially sensitive children. They need just a small part of the sky to fly, a small part of the earth to express their vision, a small space in our heart to permit them to be, just To Be.


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