



A Workshop on Alternative Education

## Why, What & How of *learning*

18th – 20th June, 2015

# ALTERNATIVE LEARNING: A QUINTESSENTIAL LEARNING

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### Defining the undefined:

At the outset, alternative learning doesn't need to be defined in specific words, pertaining to specific situations, implying to specific conditions and inducing specific results. It is rather a very conducive phenomenon which emphasises on the development of a being in a very subtly natural and spontaneous way. It believes in the development of a being in accordance with who and how he is. It doesn't stress on advocating a particular framework for providing education & learning. Instead of emphasising on the medium of learning, it is more important to focus on what is been taught & learnt; alternative methods of teaching thus, focus on the aspect of learning and not on medium.

Basically, children learn from any source they stumble upon. For them, intuition, observation, imitation, playing, experiencing, exploring, etc. is learning. For them learning is as natural as they themselves are a part of nature. They don't need any hard media such as books, toys, blackboard, divided classrooms, etc. to learn. It's us who introduced and incorporated such media in their learning processes assuming that it will facilitate their learning process. We can nonetheless, deny the utility of books, toys, etc in today's world but now it has become an imperative to think broadly about the alternative methods because there is more important learning for a student which has till now been sidelined. It is a socially accepted practice of sending children to school where they can learn, groom and grow as an individual and social being. The aim of schooling is to carve the minds of students such that they become a conformist, socially amicable and passive being. This is an apparent outcome of school education. However, the human values, ethics and morals are also presumed to be developed.

Teaching children is not as simple as the children themselves are. This matter requires a lot of intricate inputs as so to introduce the new world to them at the same time not interfering with the natural cognition processes. Instinctively, the basics of learning are a part of natural growth in living beings. They learn to communicate, eat, walk and express basic emotions (such as anger, laughter, sadness, joy, pain, etc.) merely by observing and following the else. But we tend to devise a learning mechanism for children like a computer programme as if they are some machine and need to be fed certain inputs ignoring the fact that learning is a part of natural evolution for them. Providing them a toy will not trigger an extra talent or calibre in them. Each child will explore, experience, grasp and perceive it according to his inborn values, intelligence and talent. This proves that though we provided the same toy to a group of children, its perception will differ according to an individual being. Haven't we experienced this many times in our lives? This is where the value of cognition mounts.

### **If learning is natural, why need for schooling/education:**

Undoubtedly, of all beings, human being is the most powerful and the only one to have evolved at many grounds apart from the physical. He can think, process, create, utilise and destroy the gifts of nature in his own right and way. Unlike other animals, he doesn't just do things. He is bound to do them morally, emotionally and spiritually right. He is such that his intellect can create but also pose a constant danger of being detrimental to nature. He has a big responsibility over other creatures. His intellect, memory, reasoning and creativity have given new dimensions to this world.

No doubt, nature was his first teacher. Whatever he created took inspiration from it. Then his learning devised into a proper framework of SCHOOLING. Learning became mechanical, more dependent on medium. Now, the basic question arises is – why do we need schools if learning is a natural phenomenon? Is it redundant to learn from artificial (man-made) sources despite the fact that nature is omnipresent? We evolve from nature, everything and anything we make or construct are the coordinates of nature. Then how come we criticise science, technology and other things made by human mind accusing them of being **unnatural**? The fact that human race evolved on its own terms doesn't imply the evolution being artificial. Nature inspired, man perspired and voila! technology as desired.

### **What is unnatural in nature?**

Man learns from his environment, creates or invents or innovates according to his desires and put them for the use of his own kin – the entire mankind. Whatever man did, he was assisted by his creativity, intuition and innovation. He was assisted by his cognition. Thus, whatever he thought was natural, he made was the natural output. It is the fundamental truth that nature was input and technology was the output, the only difference being that nature pertains to everything on this earth while science and technology only pertains to human beings. Thus, when we talk in this concern, shouldn't we avoid talking about technology being unnatural and talk more about balancing between the nature and technology?

The only thing that differentiates us from the other living beings is our capacity to revolutionise our evolution. Didn't provided any wings to fly, we invented flying machines. Don't have gills but we do SCUBA diving, can't hear beyond 20000 MHz, we invented RADARS and SONARS. This is the human way of evolution, which can be blamed of catalysing revolution in the nature or environment.

Sometimes he is too selfish to regard the feelings of other beings and becomes a threat to this environment. When heavy rains destroy the habitats of animals, we call it natural disaster. But if humans cut some trees to create their residences, howcome it his unnatural (we understand the clear cut difference between destruction and need)?

### **Learning, learning & learning:**

If learning is spontaneous, then why people learn differently? Why a tree is an object of difference for an artist, botanist, businessman and farmer? Do we learn according to our innateness, intelligence, interest and environment? A man is born alike; with same features, same number of limbs, same number of sense organs and even same number of bones in the body. But he thinks, behaves and reacts differently, we call it his **nature**. Like the law of energy, even nature can't be created and destroyed; it can't be even transformed, it just evolves! Interesting, isn't it?

Thus, the claim that we all carry some innate and intangible substance within right from our birth is not bizarre. Some may call it DNA, some may call it **sanskar**, some energy levels. All these subtle

parameters are strong enough to decide our behaviour. This theory can be upheld by a number of biological, psychological and philosophical reasons. They affect us in a deeper way, shaping us at different levels. A tree is a tree. But the innateness of the observer will decide how he is going to observe it. He will grasp every aspect of the object promptly which will be in tune with his wavelength.

### **Modern learning in the context of Education**

Education is a significant factor to let humans stay humans. Modernity provides you new technology, ideas, amenities and comfort. Modern education is assumed to shape the world and give it a new face. But man is reaching where he started from; towards being more savage. Or is education to be blamed for it at all? If he learns from his environment, why earlier he learnt the right values and why is he deviated from them? Learning has more become leaning towards the socially conformed framework.

Anything we say modern is definitely going to seek its roots in that period of history where the industrialization started. Modern education may also trace back its roots from the invention of printing. Its birth or transformation may be vague but the intentions are clear. Modern learning has significant characteristics – it is imparted in schools, uses books, pens, pencils, computers, etc as medium, it is syllabus oriented, divided in classrooms, has a well devised learning mechanism including examination, assessments and promotions to higher levels, everything is definitive, and above all, it is socially accepted and acclaimed. Modern learning stresses on the significance of science, logic, reasoning and truth. It has gifted us technology which has facilitated our lives very much.

Though we learn naturally like other living beings, we can say that we ourselves carry the promoters and barriers of learning within ourselves. If we share affinity towards some particular trait, we are very likely to grasp or learn it quickly. Besides, any sort of input we receive, our ego/intellect manipulates it according to our “being”. Today, the world is full of practically everything – be it natural or man-made. The environment which we live in has become a continuous source of providing excess of information. Mankind, like all other beings is an inherent and obvious part of the nature. We continue to evolve as other beings. Collectively, we ought to adhere to the society we live in and think and work towards its betterment and development at physical, mental, emotional, psychological and philosophical levels. This could be our only aim, individual aim being different for different individuals. But being the part of nature, we can never deviate from it nor our aims can ever encroach the limits decided by nature.

### **Why seek for an alternative when the modern schooling is so alluring:**

Since the advent of industrialization, the education could not also save itself from being the by-product of it. A highly comprehensive machinery was developed in the form of **schools** where the tools used were books, blackboards, copies etc.; raw materials used were the clear and immature minds of children and final products were the fully conditioned, customised, “think alike” minds who would democratically abide by the social norms. Gradually, the contact with nature and call of the instincts reduced and ultimately, we got habituated to relying more on the physical manifestations of information provided to us. Thus, we became less sensible, less natural and more modern and technically dependent.

Definitely, what we learn in schools is customised according to the needs of the society. But does it fulfil the individual's needs? Are we sure that whatever is being taught in schools are precisely our needs? Technology has provided us with all comfort that we can imagine at any level. Then, why all of a sudden talk of alternative education? Why talk of it, when the gross salaries of professionals are shooting up the skies? Why talk of it at all, when everything and every information seem to be just a click away! We have fashion, IT, technology, all possible modes of communication & transport and cellphones, tablets, e-shopping, e-learning and many more which adorn our modern lives today. But...

Have we totally grown up at all platforms? Humans thrive at many levels – physical, psychological, mental and spiritual. Apart from materialistic level, what are the achievements we have gained through this very well devised mechanism of education?

Another question arises, does schooling nurture original ideas? Does it anchor the righteous approach or shields only what is socially acceptable? Does it produce innovators or only modifiers? Does it inculcate the values of nature or harms it? Does cognition accelerates or retards due to education? Till date, what we call formal education has failed to achieve what we wished for through education. That's why there has been a constant discussion on seeking the alternative ways for teaching and learning.

#### **Is learning a timeless phenomenon:**

Well, we all stress that learning is natural. An innate part of our evolution. Then why divide it into modern and traditional? Have we ever seen a natural phenomenon which has been divided into traditional or modern or ancient? Let's say walking – can you differentiate between traditional walking and modern walking? Sounds ridiculous, isn't it?

For better understanding, we can say that learning is definitely a timeless phenomenon while its processes might be traditional or modern. The former is very likely to remain closer to nature, emphasise on learning through memory, not at all using books or other published reading materials, free of technology. On the other hand, the latter will continuously lay stress on writing, reading and referring, more dependent on technology. The former is homogeneous to society and nature while the latter has a very distinctive character. Nevertheless, they both lay stress on human values, society, development on inner being, moral values and ethics, mental and spiritual development and the betterment of this world.

#### **A matured university towards the basic learning:**

It might be absurd for a university imparting education and knowledge to scholars to suddenly talk about establishing a centre for alternative education for students. But it is a serious concern for us to strengthen the fundamentals of learning in an individual so that he will grow into a more matured, sane and wiser human being. SUBIS intends to confront the constraints posed by modern education very boldly and find a permanent and effective solution to rectify the loopholes in this modern system. Learning should not be dependent on sources, modes or information, rather its outcome should be very prominent in the thoughts, personality and actions of students. One of our primary aims is to tackle these questions intelligently and draw a conclusion that will surely enhance the quality of the subject in question. We wish to bring to notice of all what splendid results alternative learning can produce which till now have remained unaccomplished. Secondly, we intend to put

forward a few questions, doubts, constraints or loopholes that it can pose and work towards rectifying them.

Sanchi university of Buddhist-Indic studies envisages establishing a centre based on the alternative methods of teaching which don't hamper the natural learning process in children. The natural growth of instincts, mental and physical development of any human or living being is spontaneous. But what human beings require distinctively is spiritual, emotional and social development. They have some specific needs in compliance to their society and environment.

The centre of alternative learning will focus on the trends and methodologies of learning through alternative methods which will try to enhance the value, outcome and ethos of education. Till now, we have not yet devised any particular learning algorithm through alternative education. We have to facilitate the learning and save it from falling prey to the intellectual niche. Secondly, it is indispensable that the learning through alternative methods doesn't become an instrument of experimentation.

Children are not born to go schools, but they are naturally born with the instincts to learn. Thus, learning and schooling are not necessarily synonymous. This centre for alternative learning aims to develop the natural cognition in students so that they become more creative, innovative and moral. We envisage to provide a common platform to all those who are seeking some definitive operational changes in the education system.

The why's, what's, when's, where's, who's & how's in respect to alternative education are not merely the points of discussion, they are the tools that we need to work upon and eventually devise methods to make alternative education successful.

We wish to underline the necessity of innate feelings that the humans are naturally born with. The feeling to care, share, communicate, express, coexist, etc. are the basic aspects which the living beings naturally learn without the need of any tools, language or a catalyst. Moreover, the process of learning through modern education means emphasises more on the modes of learning rather than what is been taught. Too much stress is laid on the physical manifestations like words, pictures, and so on.....

The nature evolves so does the living beings, and so does the human beings. But humans have an additional aspect in their evolution; they also evolve at an intellectual, mental, psychological and spiritual level. We can't deny this axis of our evolution. Thus, humans learn from nature and they learn at different platforms. These platforms are very specific to human beings. And that's where we stand otherwise amongst the others.

A very comprehensive and simple approach should be employed to impart education to children. It should be so that it accelerates their cognition, enhances their aesthetic sense and reinforces their value system. Learning is an inclusive phenomenon of human evolution. The ambiance, tools, environment, personal inputs of the teacher, instincts and intuitions of a student, all matter a lot in the process of learning. The alternative learning methods need to lay stress on what is being taught, how it is being taught, when it is been taught, where and why it is being taught. Learning is a liberal process; it should not discomfort the aims of providing education. Learning is devised through instincts, intuitions, exploration, experimentation, experiencing, etc.

We seek to provide an operational solution and a common workable platform for an integrated team that believes in the strength of cognition and understands that learning is instinctive, not a programmed mechanism. Since we all have been stressing on the mainstream education, promoting books, teaching in a formalised pattern, it becomes rather difficult for us to understand the constraints of mainstream education which has gradually become the interwoven aspect of human society. But there are a few points which till now have been left unthought about. If the modern education promises so much knowledge, information and development then why need to seek alternative methods? Why are we losing our touch with the nature, why are we constantly becoming dependent on books, internet, technology, etc. and consequently losing our instincts? Why the things we produce, create or invent, become more a trouble than being a solution? Technology is the answer to human's physical parameter of development, not spiritual. Paradoxically, it has been observed that we have become more dependent on technology losing confidence on our senses, instincts and inherent values. We are nature, part of environment, indispensable unit of ecosystem and inherent part of the universe.

The centre will work towards enhancing the outputs of alternative methods of teaching. Knowledge has become more information centric and human mind has become a database of much redundant information. Secondly, providing information through any dead medium freezes the analytical capacity, creativity and reasoning of the brain directly slamming the cognition of an individual. The faculties become tagged to grasp information. Too much specifications, definitions, precisions tend to paralyze the imagination. Where the imagination is mechanised, the inventions and creativity automatically render a stereotype output. That's why we observe that students from regular schooling think alike.

There remains a lot to work on the teaching and examination pattern which brutally evaluates a child's creativity, calibre and intelligence. We foresee to establishing a centre which not only confronts but also provides the best solution to all these questions. We anticipate to educating children; not differently but with a difference.

