



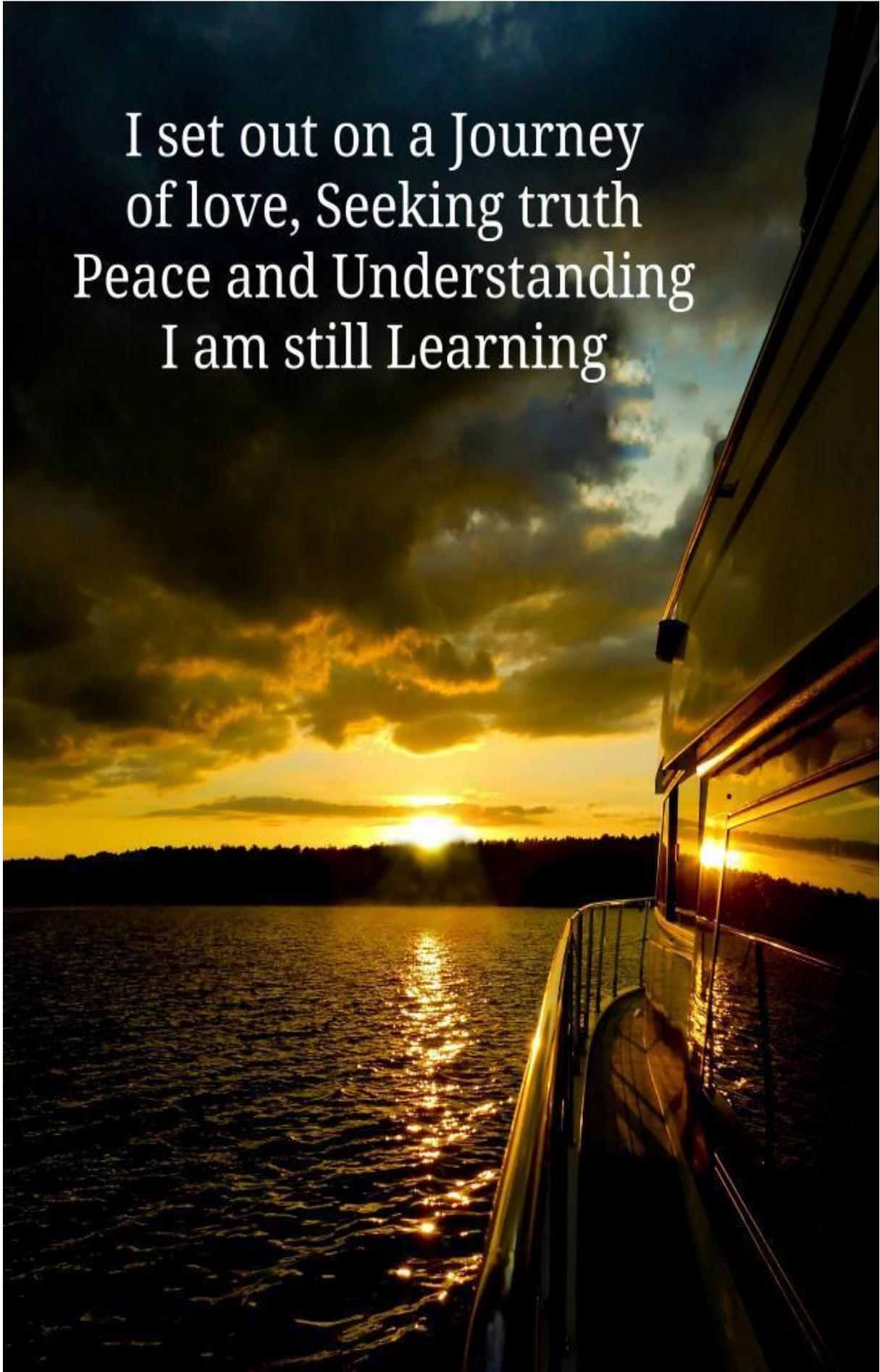
# ***PRAGYA KA PRAKHAR***

(The shine of wisdom)

***MY JOURNEY TO BECOME AN  
EDUCATOR.....***

Prerna Khetrapal

I set out on a Journey  
of love, Seeking truth  
Peace and Understanding  
I am still Learning



***KARMANAYE VADHIKARASTE MA PHALESHU KADACHANA  
MA KARMAPHALAHETURBHURMA TE SANGOSTVAKARMANI***

**You have the right to work only but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor let your attachment to be inaction.**

**BHAGWAD GITA**

**The power to be strong  
And the wisdom to be wise  
All these things will  
Come to you in time  
On this journey that you're making  
There'll be answers that you'll seek  
And it's you who'll climb the mountain  
It's you who'll reach the peak**

**Son of man, look to the sky  
Lift your spirit, set it free**

**Someday you'll walk tall with pride  
Son of man, a man in time you'll be**

**-'Son of Man' by Phil Collins (OST Lion King )**

**'Unlike a lot of people, I don't feel powerless. I know I can do something. But anyone can do something; it's not about being special. It's about deciding to do it – to dive into work for peace and justice and care for everybody on the planet.'**

**PATCH ADAMS (1998)**

# **THE JOURNEY**

**✿ THE EDUCATOR IN THE MAKING**  
**PANTHI HOON US PATH KA ANT NAHIN JISAKA**  
*(I'm a traveller of a path that has no end)*

**MY JOURNEY AS A LEARNER**

**MY EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

**ME AS AN OBSERVER**

**MY APPROACH TO SUBJECTS**

**✿ ENRICHMENT MODULES INFORMING**  
**PEDAGOGY.**

*Let us find our inner - wealth and know...the true  
meaning of treasure* *- Clive Blake*

**ENDURING TAKE AWAYS:**

**BRAIN MIND AND LEARNING**

**STORY TELLING**

**GENDER IN THE CLASSROOM**

**WORKING WITH PARENTS**

✿ **THE BREATHE OF FRESH AIR –LOOKING  
BEYOND**

**SADANANDJI  
JODO GYAN  
SDMC  
MIRAMBIKA**

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**THE *SEEKING CONCLUDES* as the *JOURNEY*  
*CONTINUES*.....**

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***PANTHI HOON US PATH KA ANT NAHIN JISAKA***  
(I'm a traveller of a path that has no end)

**MY JOURNEY AS A LEARNER**

The 10 months journey at IAAT has been gratifying for more reasons than one. In many ways its been like a continuation of my own personal journey – geared to a continuous curve of perpetual learning. Yet within that curve, the combination and simultaneous traversing of paths – where understanding and testing new theories, trudging through unknown spaces and learning to own the gaps - all create spaces of personal evolution and give it a very tangible and authentic feel. And to be able to mindfully be aware and feel that evolution within your fibre – I think – is the most gratifying experience of all.

As a skill set – learning has always held a very high place in my own personal disposition. As a value laden process , it had always been prioritized by my parents and thus I have always learned to engage with learning in a very challenging and joyful manner. What made the learning at IAAT unique and satisfying was the way that it enabled me to share the joy with others – with my peers, my mentors and of course my students. Dwelling into collaborative efforts was a norm that got initiated in the Junga diaries itself.

Situated at an altitude of 5,000 feet, camping at Junga not only catapulted us to a physical height, but tested both our individual and collaborative abilities. Each day and with each activity we were put to task and given challenges which usually required teamwork – teams were made randomly and a new team, with different members, was assigned for each task. This was followed by daily reflection - which required each one of us to mindfully share our feelings – fears, inhibitions, failures and accomplishments before, during and after the completion of tasks.



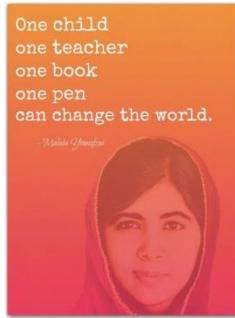
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In retrospect I could largely draw an analogy to the journey of learning and teaching that would ensue. Entering the IAAT classroom as a learner and transforming the learning, strategies and skill sets to a classroom full of young learners – became a yearlong culmination with a whole gamut of unpredictability and self doubt (mingled with apprehension of the upcoming responsibility) in between. A lot of times it was like being thrown up for an unknown 5 hour steep trek up in the mountains – where you would be carrying your heavy backpack (not to mention body weight) and expected to reach a never ending destination with just one or two people by your side at a time or being forced to attempt a 10 feet high rappelling activity – where you could bank only on the limited vicarious training and whole lot of encouragement by your batch mates. Similarly, fresh out of observations realm and accompanied by the innovative pedagogies and need to be the most empathetic and kind teacher/facilitator, you find yourself facing a curious, intelligent and delightfully naughty and challenging set of children who all are set to test your knowledge, patience and skill set to the core. It is in this kind of dynamic and novel situation, when you get a guided and encouraging feedback from your mentors (CT's and TE's) and most

importantly when you take back your gaps and learning to the shared culture of your batch mates –who in turn share their experiences and challenges – I find that in this kind of shared authentic environment, true learning actually occurred for me.

Encouraged and facilitated by our mentors, it was perhaps the first time I was learning the power of authentic sharing in a large group. As we grow up, there is a certain ‘mask’ we all are expected to wear. A mask which cautions us against revealing too much, of avoiding laying ourselves bare lest we are judged and worst – ‘manipulated’. A very mindful understanding of these masks/ patches was portrayed in the story ‘The Person Who Had Feelings.’ (1997 SMILES program). Though at a personal level, I have my own reservations of carrying our true feelings on our sleeves perpetually, however during this course two things became crystal clear to me – and these emanated both from my experiential as well as reflective realities. The first is that sharing your shortcomings – whether professional or personal in a facilitative, empathetic and accepting group is an extremely liberating experience. Liberating because it helps you release your built in pressure to fight it out alone and also because by listening to someone else’s opinion and story gives you a sense of community , that you are not alone in your journey and there are always people who will be there to lift you whenever you need them to. And secondly, and more importantly – to put in the effort to build this kind of community. Our current batch is as diversified as a batch can be – doctors, engineers, corporate workers, filmmakers, homemakers, students. They all come with their own sense and sensibilities, experiences and personal dispositions. Despite harbouring varied seeking and personal goals, I have always found a nurturing quality, a safe haven, a lending ear and a helping hand in each one of them – and these are the very places where bigger dreams and larger visions find their way home. Building such strong teams, enabling collaborative facilitation and exercising mindful personal leadership are definitely some of my strongest learning points in this journey. Moreover, by stepping out of my comfort zone, by allowing myself to take bigger and bolder risks, by ensuring that I am aware of my personal biases, prejudice and stereotypes, by making space for, allowing and including all diverse voices – both in my classroom and in my personal life and by adapting myself with a flexibility to enable all innovative changes to percolate and inform my thoughts, actions and practices – I just want to move forward in this wonderful journey of learning and teaching one small step at a time. As the young brave Pakistani activist Malalaya is so beautifully and often quoted:



## **MY EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

**When there is love for the child,  
everything is possible.**

In our initial days of exploring the vast field of education, one of the first insights was provided in our narration of our early memories and experiences of school. Even as my friends dwelled into disturbing narratives of their schooling process, their anguished nerves left much to be contemplated on the overarching urgent need that the field of teaching needs. Therein emanated our seeds of the kind of teacher we aspired to be and the kind of teaching experiences (beautifully narrated in the story of Tototchan) that we envisioned to create. Under Deepti (Priya Mehrotra) ma'am's guidance we introspected on the following question:

**What kind of teacher or educator do I want to be?**

**Elaborate.**

To answer this question in a comprehensive and holistic manner, it is imperative to fully address two inherently parallel yet enmeshed concerns – 1) what kind of environment can I- as a facilitator- provide for the child's holistic growth and 2) what are the concrete steps that I can take in that direction?

The numeration here is for clarity of thought and in the actual setting, each practice that I implement as an educator – whether in inculcating values or in doing certain tasks , will actually be empowered and guided by the first concern; that is what kind of environment will best nurture and continuously nourish the child's holistic growth- and ultimately how I can provide that in a school setting.....

In a mode of deep reflection- which I hope to carry all my life- I see myself getting intensely influenced by the thoughts of the great thinkers. Thus, I would like to make two principles as my absolute source of inspiration, understanding and guidance. First is that 'When there is love for the child, everything is possible.' And second is what Tagore says about children ,

that ‘children are in love with life, and it is their first love.’ Thus the first quality that I would like to develop as an educator is that of deep compassion and empathy – for loving someone truly, and perhaps unconditionally, requires complete acceptance, acknowledgment and respect of the child’s journey – understanding his present with a deeper engagement of his past. Being non – judgmental becomes an extremely crucial imperative ;for judging and labelling for its very sake often robs the child from loving and laughing his way through life and scars and confines him, making him fearful of stepping out into any unknown zone –just by the mere thought of being judged and misunderstood. I would do my utmost in creating a very open environment in my class and space of work where each child is thoroughly encouraged to express himself freely – to openly talk about his fears and inhibitions, to understand the source of all the limitations in their life (actually very similar to the space that IAAT created and continues to encourage for us) to acknowledge the sheer hard work that would be required to face all the pain required for personal growth and develop the willingness to dive into it. Fostering an environment of love – self and mutual acceptance would definitely be my first priority as a teacher.

Next is the focus on domain knowledge and expertise – the extreme clarity of my knowledge accompanied with my continuous flexibility to alter it in light of new information and wisdom. Here I would also like to mention Gijubhai Badheka’s emphasis on children’s need for “an atmosphere nurturing independence and self-reliance.” Thus Gijubhai narrates extremely creative ways of teaching all possible subjects – say through stories and rhymes – that would help arouse the child’s curiosity. This idea holds a lot of appeal for me and I would definitely like to work at better and more creative ways of instilling knowledge in children as and when the need arises.

Finally , Sri Aurobindo and Mother’s idea of ‘ integral education’ will be my strong philosophical modus operandi. The idea of ‘integral education’ is one in which all dimensions of the growing child—physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual—are addressed. I would love and genuinely try and engage with all the physical sports and activities with my students – learning to fall, get hurt, learn and stretch boundaries for myself too. Discuss issues on practices of healthy eating, exercise in a laughing and sharing manner wherein they themselves get informed about healthy eating and living and find that commitment within themselves to practice it daily in their lives. Again mental and vital values can be encouraged by creating and genuinely providing a nurturing and non judgemental environment – free or fear of any kind. The reflections – which I would try and encourage through stories and even role plays – may help each child develop a capacity to reflect and be aware of his constant psychological processes – his decisions

and behaviour emanating from deep rooted needs and how they could be brought into the conscious- to understand and deal with them better. I am very confident that once all these processes initiate and smoothly flow in their rhythm, finding his true ‘ *swabhav*’ – and enjoying a blissful and peaceful life would be the most natural manifestation for such a child and the biggest blessing of education and us as facilitators.



A great teacher who is full  
of excitement and love for  
her students can make all  
the difference in their lives.

Devi Patrick

PICTUREQUOTES.COM



PICTUREQUOTES

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## **ME AS AN OBSERVER**



Building the tool of observation was a great starting point in this journey of becoming an educator. For me –building my skills in pure observation also emerged as a great challenge because in my previous professional capacity as a therapist, I was required to observe and process the information simultaneously in order to intervene and arrive quickly at pragmatic solutions. Thus to isolate judgements and predictions from observations *completely* was a pretty daunting task. And like all challenges that make you step out of your comfort zone, scepticism to adopt the skill accompanied me when I entered the classroom setting. The all-pervasive, piercing clarity of the process was that 1) observation should be all about looking or perceiving/noticing /listening for a specific reason or purpose and should/can thus involve all five senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste and 2) we often bring our own judgements, assumptions , stereotypes , likes and dislikes to the observation table and that being aware and fully conscious of these attributes can help us get rid of them.

The more I was able to adopt these principles, the richer my observation diary became. In teaching and dealing with grade 7 children, I found teachers using different strategies to teach as well as discipline. I noticed their verbal language, their body language, their attitude and gestures – both overt and subtle – at different times and for different purposes. I

realized how they taught the content, when they paused and prioritized disciplinary practices, how they handled transition time and students who got distracted easily, how they engaged the class and kept an eye on each student's response pattern. How they discerned the overall mood of the class and even altered lesson plans according to the pace and learning readiness of the class – separately for each period.

Observing the children while sitting and merging with them gave even greater insights into their world as a student situated in a classroom setting. The whole gamut ranged from observing how they reacted to each teacher's presence differently. Their perception of the subject teacher and how that coloured and shaped the learning process of that subject and knowledge content. How engaged they were with different topics – I would interview them later on the same- or revelation would even come in their off hand remarks to the teacher 'Ma'am, this subject is very boring!' or to each other. Which activities got them more hooked to dwell on any topic/subject in a given day. Whether it was the difficulty of the content, the abstractness of a given concept or the manner in which the teacher took up a complex topic that got them disengaged on any given day. What motivated them to finish home assignments and was the learning in the classroom visible at other places such as independently attempted accurate home assignments or class assessments – verbal or written. And most importantly how 'safe' the child felt in voicing his/her opinion or an incorrect (though encouraged to be well thought of) response to any problem or question posted by the teacher. All these norms and conducive environment are, no doubt, a teacher's prerogative to create and maintain and imbibing and consulting these points – while entering and creating my teaching environment is something I will look forward to.

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## **MY APPROACH TO SUBJECTS**

In my school and college days, I had always been a meritorious student and though I do remember teachers being patient, encouraging and supportive towards our failures - there are **very few** pedagogical practices or classroom environment settings that I could trace back as paving way for any kind of pro -active student engagement , generating interest or creating any type of enduring learning of the concepts or subject at large. It was this engagement with the strategies and practices of child centric pedagogies that became the backbone of my learning processes and growth as a teacher and educator here at IAAT. Though there is no actual limit to what combination of

strategies and practices that can be employed in each subject, I shall briefly touch upon my own learning from each one of them.

## **LEARNING AND TEACHING MATHS**

**Historically and culturally, Maths originated from human experiences and subsequently human practices and if they were developed from human practices, they can be learned and transmitted through them.  
(from Shaji's classes)**

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My most crucial understanding of learning and teaching of maths has been the realization that any pedagogy that aims to engage and meaningfully embed the mathematical concepts, amongst kids, has to be contextualized vis-à-vis the daily life situations – or experiences. The more students are able to relate with and apply numbers, operations, movement from concrete to abstract phenomena through advances in all mathematical branches of geometry, algebra, arithmetic and angles, the more relatable the theory and learning becomes in the class – and higher is the chance that the subject fulfils its most important purpose for students – that of developing higher order thinking skills – problem solving, abstract and logical reasoning that enables students to become critical and logical thinkers.

## **LEARNING AND TEACHING ENGLISH**

The language classes provided great insights in the language acquisition culture of young minds. For me Brian Cambourne's model – or more specifically the conditions he states for language learning for young children – provided a window to encourage and offer more of this learning space and environment for the young children, so that language acquisition and subsequent mastery can be a natural process in which learning can be owned by the child in a completely safe and (oral and written) print rich environment. Engaging in active interactions, 'talk' with a young child and creating a talk rich environment also greatly facilitates his acquisition skills.

The difference between 'authentic literature' – one created for the sheer purpose and love for expression and other genres and narratives also set a benchmark in my understanding of the available texts/ literary pieces. Getting into the intricacies of purpose and forms of reading, writing and speaking – with its purpose and intent also paved way for getting student proficient in the subject.

## **LEARNING AND TEACHING SCIENCE**

One of the most important and generic revelations of understanding of Science from this course was that 1) Science is political and driven by markets and economics. Discoveries done at various points of time have been motivated and encouraged to further boost markets and power structures. 2) more important is to understand that beyond the curriculum, teaching and learning science is more about building a scientific temper – curiosity, unbiased observation, questioning, building on logical reasoning, critical thinking and developing a consistent rigour of scientific inquiry – which would build into other facets of life as well. The 7E model was a great learning experience – both for pedagogical practices and overall approach to the science curriculum as it encourages to move beyond the current topic and extend and transfer the experience to the real world.

## **LEARNING AND TEACHING SOCIAL SCIENCE**

The single biggest learning of being social science teacher was a perpetual and sustained awareness of planning lessons and introducing methods and resources that could – as far as possible – bring the actual society to the classroom. Starting from E.V.S in younger classes to History, Geography, Civics and Economics – and navigating the developmental route of concrete to abstract – the purpose to study all aspects of self and society is one and one only – to put students on a democratic path of becoming responsible world class citizens – where they can be aware of all social structures and practices that hamper peaceful co-existence and to understand that each one of us can contribute in our small ways to make our nation and the world at large – a more tolerant, harmonious, happy and peaceful world to be in. The harmony with nature is seen as even more crucial than that with humans – and with earth as a whole on the absolute brink of exhausting its natural resources – the urgent and imperative need to empower students to take and live by pro-active measures to save these perishable and limited resources – has never been greater. As teachers of social sciences, our classes have to be geared to addressing these larger issues.

## **ENRICHMENT MODULES INFORMING PEDAGOGY.**

*Let us find our inner - wealth and know...the true meaning of treasure* *- Clive Blake*

### **ENDURING TAKE AWAYS:**

- **BRAIN MIND AND LEARNING**
- **STORY TELLING**
- **GENDER IN THE CLASSROOM**
- **WORKING WITH PARENTS**

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### ➤ **BRAIN MIND LEARNING**

The brain is a primary and one of the most spectacular organs of body – and the seat of all learning. This module was great in providing insights into its functioning – structure and processes, the gender difference in structure and functioning – seats /parts of brain responsible for learning with a crucial discussion on 1) how the knowledge can be useful in our teaching and learning pedagogies and

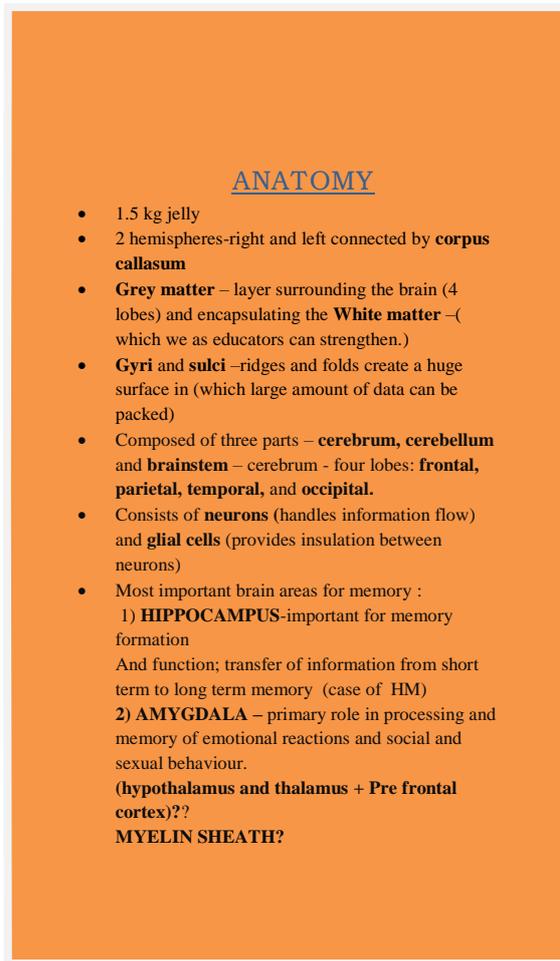
2) the extreme importance of maintaining its health as the brain and mind ages.

# A TEACHERS BRAIN AT NIGHT:

JOHNNY NEEDS TO FINISH HIS WRITING PROJECT,  
I NEED MORE COFFEE,  
I HAVEN'T SEEN EZRA IN 3 DAYS,  
AM I DOING ENOUGH, MY HOUSE IS A MESS,  
I'M TIRED, I CAN'T SLEEP,  
OH, I NEED NEW LABELS, BRIGHT ONES,  
WHAT AM I TEACHING NEXT WEEK,  
WAIT-WHAT AM I TEACHING  
TOMORROW... 1 SHEEP,  
2 SHEEP, OH GOSH WHY CAN'T I SLEEP?!

(COURTESY – PINTEREST)

The following is the **concept map of brain** (that I created) based on some aspect of class learning.

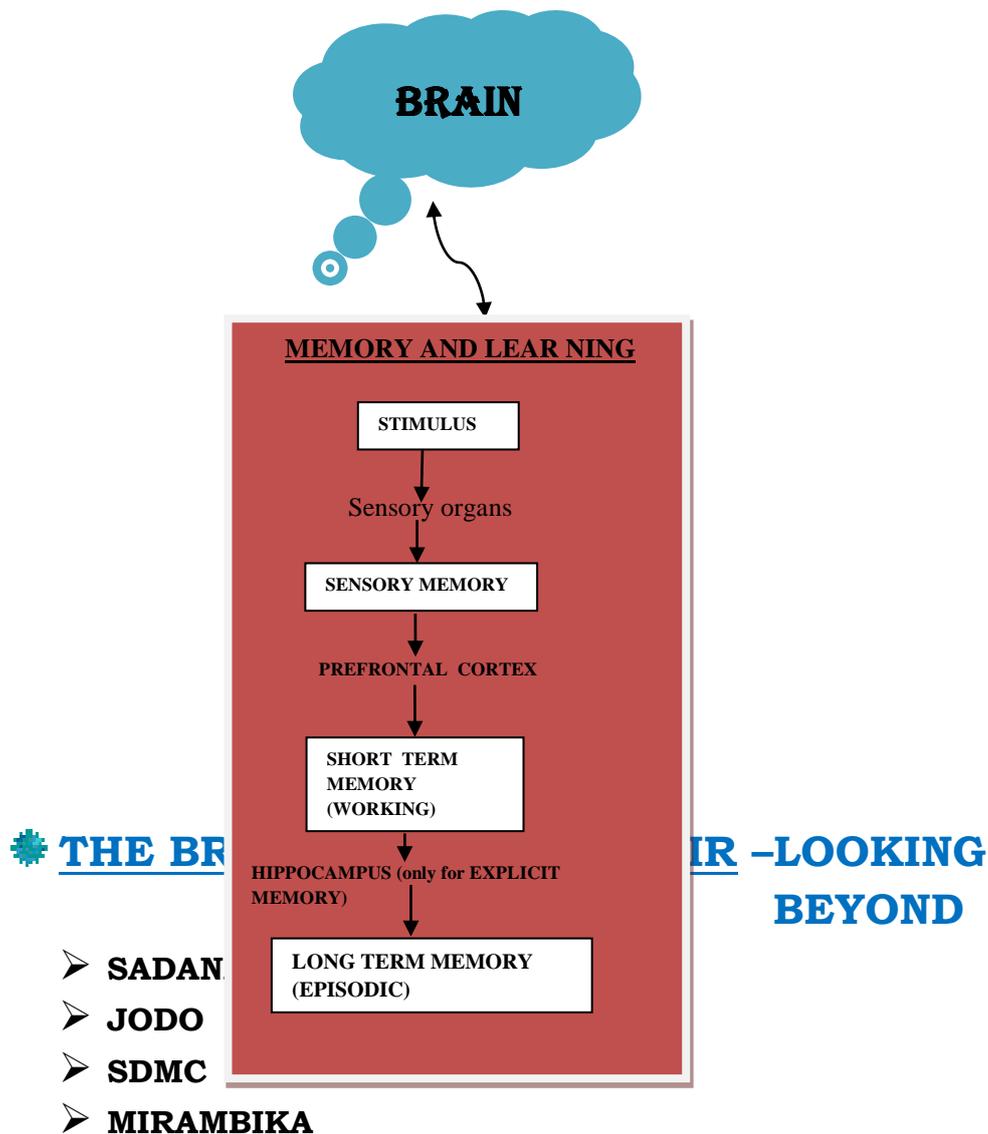


## STEPS TO ENHANCE MEMORY AND FACILITATE LEARNING IN YOUNG CHILDREN

- Awareness of 'golden period', hence appropriate care – diet, stimulation and nurturance (Attachment Theory)
- Importance of protein-rich

## IMPORTANT FACTS

- **0-6** is the **GOLDEN PERIOD** of brain development
- Brain **can** survive only for four minutes



Learning to create spaces and experiences in the classroom – wherein children could be enabled and equipped with skills, values and faculties to handle real life challenges was always going to be a challenging task. But in this arduous path, certain days and journeys introduced us to fresh perspectives and thought processes that invigorated our minds and spirits. Sadanandji's in house visit and our visits to Jodo Gyan, SDMC and Mirambika schools brought that absolute breeze of inspiring fresh air.

I have shared the SDMC experience in detail. With others, I have tried to pen down some learning that touched me in various ways.

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### **SADANANDJI – a true seeker and teacher**

As a student of Psychology, I had come across many definitions of Intelligence throughout my coursework, but the one given by Sadanandji really raised the construct to a whole together different level. He defined intelligence as ‘ ***flexible response to context.***’ I could relate so well to the depth of the whole thought and with time have realized that intelligence in real life is actually the ability to adapt to whatever situation life throws at you – with persistence, faith and laughter. The other extremely insightful takeaways were:

- **Students become the adult they live with**
- **We do not need to change the students ,we just need to inspire them**
- **We create ourselves by what we choose to notice**
- **Willingly taking responsibility for our choices is freedom**
- **While interacting with other always choose curiosity over criticality**

### **JODO GYAN**

From *Jodo Gyan* I truly learned how with absolute passion and graceful simplicity one can create powerful learning spaces, experiences and classrooms for even the most underprivileged of kids. It sent a benchmark , in itself for all the following reasons and beyond:

- 1) The multilevel, multi grade system allowed for true collaborative learning amongst the students where juniors could benefit from their seniors knowledge and prompt pool as much as the teachers and the older kids could revisit the original concept(s) and build upon them.
- 2) Sourcing teachers from local and familiar settings helps students connect to them better along with providing great employment opportunities to the faculty members.

### **MIRAMBIKA**

***mitti ki hai jo khushboo tu kaise bhulayega (how will you forget the fragrance of this soil?)***

The official website of Mirambika describes it as - [Research Centre for Integral Education and Human Value](#). And in a lot of ways it is truly that. Based on the integral philosophy of Shri Aurobindo and the mother, it truly comes across as space where each child is celebrated and nurtured and this can be seen both in the classrooms as well as outside them. The day we visited, the students were celebrating their sports day and the sheer variety of exercises and skills with ropes, balls and skates that the children displayed was sheer joy to watch. Later walking around the classrooms, observing the classes in progress – small sizes with teacher moving around and communicating with each student to understand his/ her level and individually work on the learning gaps as well as allowing spaces for dissent and disagreements gave me a sense of a true democratic class – where each child felt safe in voicing his /her opinion. The variety of books – both national and international authors – diversified content and genres; as well as books on spiritual values formed a ravishing rainbow of range held in the library – which catered to the youngest age to the oldest classes.

It was truly a very liberating experience to know that such a haven can exist for the budding learners – a perfect place to unfold their wings and give them a perfect launching pad to fly.

## ***CHOTA SA PRAYAS***



***HAR BACHPAN KA CHOTA SA SAPNA***

***PAD LIHKAR KUCCH SHIKSHA PRAPT KARNA***

***AAO DE UNKE SAPNO KO CHOTE SE PANKH***

***UMEEDON KI UDAAN, SHIKSHA KA SAGAR PAAKAR, HUEN  
UJJWALIT***

***KHUD KARE APNE AGAANYTA KE ANDHKAAR KO GYAN  
SE PRAJJULIT***

***(EVERY CHILDHOOD HAS ONE DREAM AND THAT IS TO STUDY AND RECEIVE AN EDUCATION. LET US GIVE THEM WINGS. LET US LIGHT OURSELVES WITH ASPIRATIONS, HOPE AND EDUCATION. LET US REMOVE THE DARKNESS OF IGNORANCE WITH LIGHT, LITERACY AND WISDOM.)***

## **SDMC AND COMMUNITY CHAPTER**

### **PROLOGUE**

The four day SDMC- community project was extremely intriguing, informative and enlightening. It contributed to my space of holistic understanding – gave me a real taste and experience of how the communities in Delhi are working at ground level ; about the people - small glimpse and experience of their living styles, aspirations, their thoughts on education and how they go about fulfilling them .Alongside, it gave me a wonderful opportunity to work with my classmates together to put up a small, but loving endeavour – in terms of *Bal Mela* , which turned out to be a huge success in terms of organizing, management, implementation and entertainment.

But before I dwell into the process and experience of the community, a quick look at the government’s vision and policies for the corporation schools catering to the underprivileged. Simultaneously, a quick look at the SDMC (Hauz Khas Police Colony, the one that we visited, associated to the IAAT.) structure also and how it evolved within its designated parametres.

### **PADE CHALO BADE CHALO (Keep studying and growing) THE VISION AND EDUCATION SYSTEM PROVIDED BY THE GOVERNMENT**

The Directorate of Education clearly emphasizes its vision on its website – ‘Education holds the key to economic growth, social transformation and modernizational integration. The National Policy on education formulated in 1986 and modified in 1992 aims to provide education of a comparable quality up to a given level to all

the students.’ The SDMC schools fall under the umbrella of MCD schools which provide primary education to underprivileged students. In its coverage of the progress of the SDMC schools over time, The Times of India mentions that around 2.5 lakh students study in SDMC’s 581 schools, most of them belonging to low-income families that cannot afford private education.(TOI August 2017) . In a recent decision , SDMC has decided to adopt English as a medium of teaching in all its schools from the next academic session. It will begin initially with one section in nursery and Class I that will have English medium instruction, with Hindi remaining an option. These English sections will, in consecutive academic years, become the succeeding English section of higher classes. Thus there are attempts being initiated to truly get the underprivileged children at par with their other age mates and small steps to bridge the private government schools gap.

### **SDMC – FACULTY’S UNDERSTANDING AND VISION**

The SDMC at Hauz Khas – the one that we visited was started in 1980. Since 2015-16, the school came under the School Quality Enhancement Program (SQEP) – started by SDMC in 2015 and now has 8 partners and 28 schools on board. IAAT’s collaboration with the school began in April 2016. The values, pedagogies and practices were tied and tuned into the contemporary practices of child centric holistic education. With a dedicated team of principal and teachers, slowly the daily challenges and struggles of these children were realised and catered to by roping in professionals and groups (from NGO’s for activities like clay modelling ( Art of Clay group), music and theatre (Manzil Mystique) and computer teachers for grade III and IV. These groups helped to channelize a lot of frustrations and behavioural challenges of the children, (after the introduction of these groups , the aggression in the kids were seen to de-escalate by a considerable amount.) as well as provide opportunities to develop skills and tap talent which would otherwise go unnoticed. I also observed that the both the administration and staff was extremely aware and sensitive to the educational , social and psychological environment of the children being catered to – whether it was understanding the socio economic status and culture at home or the fact that there were very few opportunities for these children to engage in the learning process at home , with their process, in a meaningful way simply because the parents were illiterate and lacked the appropriate exposure and opportunities to give their children the required environment. Combined with these is the challenge of migration, wherein the families might have to shift residence because of better earning opportunities or some other constraints. Thus being prepared to handle a class with new faces , diverse backgrounds and limitations; and factoring in a child centric pedagogy which can handle this diversity and still manage some productivity in itself is highly admirable!

Equally interesting was the visit to the communities – the families of these students – wherein lay the foundation of these children .To truly facilitate the learning process, it was equally important to understand where these children came from. As one faculty member put it ‘these kids have to put in greater efforts and we have to work harder on environmental influences.’

## **INTEGRATING COMMUNITY BACK INTO SCHOOL - THE INDIRA COMMUNITY**

### **THE COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE**

The Junga experience in July had taught me that a lot of expeditions planned by IAAT were packed with surprises, great learning experiences and insights. As it turned out that the SDMC visit with an accompanying inbuilt community model came both as a surprise and a small yet extremely significant window offering a glimpse of what the education of the contemporary Indian communities looked like .....

At first instance, the very first impression of the ‘ Indira community’ that I got was of narrow lanes with people all over the streets. Though the space seemed too restricted, yet people looked relaxed in each other’s company and the age group varied from new borns in their mothers arms to very aged 60 - 70 year olds lying on the cot, lazing in the sun or just inside their homes. A closer study though did reveal that that the conglomerate consisted of families belonging to different states (migrants of U.P., Bihar and M.P) . There were people living there for the past 40 – 50 years as well, septuagenarians who had come as young brides at the age of 19 – 20. Majority of the population were Hindu and with the special festival of *chath*(sacred to the people of Bihar) approaching, the demarcation for Biharis v/s non- Biharis were at times mocked at, other times stated with pride. Having said that, there were definitely spaces within the community where the streets were extremely congested and the drains were open resulting in a sharp stench . Yet within the cramped and unhygienic spaces there were men and women with huge aspirations for their children – aspirations for a better living space, a better future place. The women were doing all kinds of domestic chores – mostly employed as domestic maids in people’s house and males were working as class IV employees in neighbouring societies. There were more than the ‘basic’ amenities available in most of the homes including washing machines, T.V, mobile phones and scooter/motorcycles. But there was certainly a deep

desire for more...much more, which they hoped and believed could be bridged by Education and this is what this whole write up boils down to – *the aspirations of the community – their hopes and beliefs of their future, the role of education in fulfilling them , how the government has devised the infrastructure and devised pedagogies for these communities, what is happening at the ground level and keeping all these factors in kind then what is my understanding of the role of an educator.* Addressing these concerns will form the core of this paper.

### **INDIVIDUAL FAMILY EXPERIENCE**

Interacting with one of the community families closely was an extremely insightful expedition for me – as it challenged a lot of my assumptions about the people, especially women. Although in my research experience I have found that simply talking to people – as in case study method- without observing them in their natural settings can at times reveal a slightly prejudiced and artificial perspective as in the people may give out socially desirable responses and act absolutely in a diametrically opposite manner in real life. Nevertheless, conversations do reveal some thought processes and patterns, which could at least help reveal the awareness of the people concerned – (the first step to any change in behaviour and subsequent lifestyle.) While exploring the community , we came across an old age lady with whom we started making general conversation such as how long had she been living in the community area and what her experience of life there had been. She told us how she had been living there since last 40 years at least (same year that she got married). She had migrated to the city from the village with her husband. In the meanwhile, her daughter-in-law came and invited us in the house. We decided to engage her in the conversation as well. Their house was one of the better built in the community as their male patriarch was one of the well knows people and a kind of *sarpanch* in the village and hence he was a figure that was often called to sort out the dispute between the various families. The mother-in-law was clear that boys were very important for the propagation of the family name , yet , at the same time education of girls was of utmost importance. She was proud of the fact that her daughter was able to produce a male child even after 3 granddaughters. She would often look at her daughter- in -law in a slightly apprehensive manner as if afraid to say something that may offend her. However a few discussions with the daughter-in-law was personally immensely impressive for me. Alcohol abuse and wife beating are two very real problems in this society. The daughter -in-law was very clear that with

girls getting educated they no longer had to face abuse. Moreover, only if there was a suitable enough boy who could keep her daughter happy, will she think of marrying her daughter. Otherwise it would be better that her daughter stayed unmarried and earn with peace than get married and beaten up everyday. What struck me , and will always stay with me is – 1) we are truly living in a transitional society where the basic socio cultural sensibilities are undergoing change and 2) education in its quest to empower individuals and provide holistic development to the child and society, must then be attuned to the changing expectations and values of the people 3) students and their families must get empowered by education to fulfil their individual and community aspirations.

I wish we could spend enough time to listen and study the community better, but still the limited interaction left a very positive impression on my mind.

### **EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY**

There is a palpable change in the whole discourse and conversations around education in these communities. These can be gauged by the fact that though the current earning generation is hardly 'literate' , their aspirations to break the social and economic backward 'ceiling' propels them to guide their children to a better future and thus education, in majority of the cases, becomes a means of getting skilled jobs, better money prospects and hence a better lifestyle. The question, then is, is this happening? Is the government creating pedagogies and institutions that is helping these students achieve their place in the society? Are we giving deep enough roots to enable their wings for their flights?

### **UJJAWALIT DIYA (Lightened lamp) - MY ROLE AS AN EDUCATOR**

There were extensive and extremely lively discussions in the class after the community visit. Debates and discussions highlighted the gap between government's resolve and philosophies with which the various programmes, projects and educational institutions were established for the underprivileged. As a student of social science , I am aware that for any society to break away from its shackles of regressive thinking and dark spaces , the progressive thought patterns generated by awareness and deployment of energy and thinking into constructive fields is the precursor of any change, and the whole education system has to be

geared to ensure that along with equipping an individual to earn livelihood, they could learn the values associated with it so that they can become contributing members of society as well. Thus though working with people and young students at this level provides a fantastic opportunity to do my bit, I know my current life path requires a different field of working. Yet it has definitely sensitized me to the constraints and limitations whenever I have to deal with a child of this particular strata and I hope to come back to this write up , time and again to do so.

### **KSHITIJ KE USS PAAR (BEYOND HORIZONS) - QUESTIONS AND HOPES FOR THE FUTURE....**

There is a beautiful philosophy I believe in is that whatever you focus on in life expands. This policy I guess holds true for endeavours within organizations as well. The entire enterprise behind government and state run educational institutions is to hand over the knowledge and value tools to a lot of underprivileged children. Though they keep coming up with reforms from time to time – in order to sustain children in the model, yet the drop rate is extremely high- dues to many reasons like migration or domestic constraints (especially girls held back to take care of younger siblings). On the other hand of the continuum there are young and middle aged mothers earning despite all odds to ensure that their daughters get educated and move towards a future that is qualitatively and quantitatively more enhanced than their own. They see education as means of a better livelihood, better living conditions and definitely a better future – where they can step out of the domestic shackles whenever it gets too violent and can provide a safe haven for themselves and their children. But then are we doing justice to their aspirations? Are we implementing the pedagogy with the rigour that is required? –( especially given that the children are unable to get proper support from their parents in their lessons and homework.) For me as an educator, whenever I get an opportunity to be with these children or to teach them, how easily would I be able to work with them – at their level, to ensure justice can be done to their efforts?...and also are we building enough sensitization within the teacher community to not see a government teacher’s job as merely ‘comfortable and well paid government job’ and be willing to actually reach out to each and every underprivileged child who is carrying not only her/his own but the entire community’s efforts and aspirations on her/his shoulder?..... the answers and reflections will definitely trickle in ...meanwhile the seeking continues.....



THE *SEEKING CONCLUDES* as the *JOURNEY*  
*CONTINUES*.....

**The journey for me has just begun. Now to just dive in this vast ocean of learning, seeking and teaching and take my small step to enlighten the world, one small flame at a time....*zindagi aa raha hoon main.*  
(Dear life, I'm coming .....**)

**'HE who in the midst of the greatest activity finds the sweetest peace, and in the midst of the greatest calmness is most active, he has known the secret of life.'**

**Swami Vivekananda**

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I FACILITATE THINKING.  
I ENGAGE MINDS.  
I LISTEN TO QUESTIONS.  
I ENCOURAGE RISK.  
I SUPPORT STRUGGLE.  
I CULTIVATE DREAMS.  
I LEARN EVERYDAY.

**I TEACH.**

