

## ***My Search – Sita Nayar***

As a teacher dissatisfied with the conventional educational system, there were three questions which started me on the search for a meaningful education:

- a. Why were children mostly so disinterested in learning?
- b. Why was there so much noise everywhere – in classrooms, outside classrooms – just about everywhere? Why was “discipline” such a problem in most schools?
- c. Why were teachers, generally, such an unhappy and frustrated community?

While I didn't have any answers to these questions then, one thing I knew for certain was that there was going to be no meaningful learning as long as these problems persisted, and also that I could never feel motivated to continue teaching in this environment which seemed to bring nothing but frustration to all involved.

It gradually became clear to me that the noise which seemed to fill the schoolrooms and corridors and grounds was not coming from outside. It was noise from the inside – inside the children and inside the adults. It was the noise which had just collected in all our heads from the millions of unresolved issues from our very early days.

Each child who came to me at the age of three came with his own learning agenda. He could keep himself very busy through the day with his own work (what we call 'play'). This free play was very essential to help him to make sense of his world and all its complexities. With each new learning that his self-driven exploration brought, he found a new equilibrium. As there was no external attempt to rush his learnings, he

found each new equilibrium in a state of peace and thus found his inner balance. There was no mounting restlessness within him.

When free play was denied him or even curbed to varying degrees, the child did not have the opportunity to find his inner balance at his own pace. He felt rushed and frustrated because the learnings did not come easily to him. In this state he was a distracted child, unable to focus his mind, intensely, on anything.

The striking of the inner balance through self-directed exploration required a longer stretch of time than was typically available to the children. As I incorporated into the child's day, changes which respected his position, I found that the noise inside him seemed to come down and, in time, the noise outside also lessened. In other words, the restlessness which prevented each child from recognizing his own interests and drives and, therefore, from pursuing them in a constructive way, decreased, gradually. All I needed to do was to try to the best of my ability to develop an environment which permitted children to explore their interests freely. The children in the new set-up continued to explore. I, the adult, continued to interact with them; I listened to them, talked with them, discussed with them, and empathized with them.

They continued to explore their environment as freely and systematically as any scientist would, uninterrupted by the sensitive, watchful adults around them. In time as they were ready I began to read to them. I helped *them* learn how to read. They played with numbers. They learned how to write. The development of thinking skills was a natural component of the approach adopted in all these areas. In other words, I merely helped them acquire some of the tools they needed in order to become self-dependent learners driven by an inner need to know, investigate and learn. It seemed crucial that I did nothing to kill this

drive. The children automatically began to take responsibility for their own learning. I then planned our program in such a way that I would take from their real and significant learning experiences, as little time as was needed for them to develop the basic tools to keep this learning process going for life. It was very important that this was accomplished without taking away from them the time they desperately needed to keep their scientific minds alive.

For instance,

A child sees a butterfly sitting on a leaf for the first time in her life. Her own thinking powers are being exercised at a pace comfortable to her. She is absorbing the shape, the colours, the patterns on the wings and so many more things that we cannot even imagine any more, as conditioned adults. The child is thoroughly fascinated by the butterfly. The next time she sees another butterfly she notices the same things and, perhaps, a few more new things. She might notice that this creature is so much like the one she saw some days ago. She might notice that this, too, has the same pattern on its two wings, yet it is a different pattern to the one on her last butterfly, and so on... Over time she sees more of these creatures. She continues to make her own observations, comparisons, and she begins to draw certain conclusions.

This is a deeply satisfying experience for every learner. I, as an adult, need to be careful that I do not deny children these very valuable experiences and, thereby, limit their perspectives as my own have been limited by teachers who taught me too many facts too soon in my life.

I believe that Life is best explored in this manner because the child's natural environment is packed with possibilities for scientific experiences, and any attempt I make to pick and choose for him at this

stage will severely limit these possibilities and, worse still, it will transfer the learning responsibility onto the teaching adult - me.

When the children have absorbed enough from the environment in this manner, they are better able to make sense of what they are taught later on in their lives.

I have observed that the children who have experienced this program from the very outset for a minimum of 4-5 years, exhibit a tremendous amount of inner settlement coupled with a deep interest in learning. They are well able to direct their own learning. The natural learning abilities with which the children are born are strengthened and they are able to engage positively with themselves and the world around them.

I feel strongly that the environment in which a child grows must foster the growth of his inner strength (coming from a clear understanding of his self), a sense of responsibility, self-motivation, and a zest for life.

At Bhavya we have created a humane environment in which each child can learn and grow in accordance with his nature. The learning environment here preserves the child's dignity, innate sensitivity, originality, initiative, problem-solving attitude - qualities we would like to see in all of humanity. It is of great importance to us that we sustain, at Bhavya, an educational program that preserves the core of the humanity and the Life that exists in each one of us. In this endeavour, we believe, that all of us have a significant part to play.