

AUGUST 2012

VOLUME VI ISSUE 03

Rs. 40

www.mentormagazine.net

Mentor

A MATTER of Principal



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INDEPENDENCE DAY!!! - MENTOR REPORTS...



A lady of high moral values and principles, imbibed in her through her intensive schooling and education from the esteemed Lady Irwin College, New Delhi, **Mrs. ANITA VERMA**, Principal of Shanti Asiatic School has been into education for the last thirty years. "The infinite capacities of the human mind have always fascinated me. Recollections of my earliest memories go back to those childhood years. 'Why', 'What', 'When', 'How', 'What if' – these questions always provoked me into going deeper and deeper seeking probable answers to never ending questions" writes Mrs. Anita Verma to MENTOR ...



The Human Mind...

My intensive schooling backed by a Masters course in Child Development and Family Relationships from the prestigious Lady Irwin College, New Delhi helped me construct upon my basic beliefs. At a time when research in child centeredness in education was just beginning to gain credence, I realised that a child's innocent

questions are actually the key to discovering her/his unique learning styles. Teaching therefore, has been a strong conscious choice for me and the three decades of my professional career have been devoted to continuous understanding and unravelling the threads of education at different levels.

Charging the Youth Brigade...

The journey of my career began from working with our youth in India's first Agricultural University at Pantnagar in Nainital. Being a part of the youth brigade at that time, I could easily identify with the abundant and at times, the unbridled talent of the youth and the urgent need to harness this very power and potential. The focused curriculum, intensive work programmes, systematic thinking in approach, carefully calibrated assessments and the use of technology to enhance productivity was strongly ingrained as values for transforming education and empowering students.

Setting up laboratory schools in both rural and urban settings thereafter in different states, made me realise that the vast majority of our students remain burdened with too much of remembering and memorisation rather than understanding and learning. 'Aiming high' is still considered synonymous with scoring high marks rather than doing something more relevant, something path breaking or extraordinary.

Gaining Awareness of Self...

We have to provide a telescope to our children so that they can explore the world and see the infinite possibilities that can be attained. At the same time, we have to provide them that microscope too through which they can discover their own beings, their own self! It is important for them to be happy and satisfied with themselves and their achievements; develop self-respect and discipline and recognise their own strengths and weaknesses. They can only build on to their self-belief and esteem. Helping students combat their internal and societal pressures, dealing with unrealistic parental aspirations and most of all, the gender bias against girls which is much prevalent today are the real issues that needs to be focused on, if at all we desire to bring a real social change.

Shifting Gears...

The turn of the millennium was also the dawn of a new awakening in my professional journey.

Globalisation, emergence of new knowledge economies, climate change, technological advances, terrorism, new parenting patterns and emerging health issues impacted to a large extent by modern day living began to exercise a tremendous bearing on the Generation Y. This generation which has grown in the digital world is not prepared to be a passive consumer of media and knowledge. The challenges had magnified as parents were no longer interested in single generic schools.

Communication between school and parents is the key to a good relationship as parents are regarded as co-educators and plenty of opportunities are created for the home and school to work in tandem

As educators, we have to provide a nourishing environment for all those skills where a child shows aptitude as well as encourage them to discover new thoughts and ideas. New pedagogies embracing different styles, especially the use of new technology requires a lot of unlearning and relearning. On the other hand, modern day family stress and inadequate parenting also beckons the need for greater responsibility to be adopted by schools.

It was at this time that I accepted the challenge of becoming the Founder Principal of an international level residential school for girls, Swaminarayan Vidyapith. The institution which was primarily built along the ethos of a traditional, yet progressive socio-spiritual organisation made me realise the richness and vastness of our ancient scriptures and Vedic values. What enlightened me was the realisation that the right synthesis of these traditional and progressive factors could be integrated and



applied perfectly even in today's modern times. The "School in School" concept where all facilitators are given constant motivation and training to keep them updated with advancements in their main areas of teaching emphasised the need for continuous learning.

Empowering the Girl Child...

One of my firm beliefs in life and work revolves around empowerment of women. Education has to begin with the girl child for she can charge and change the world. Not only does she need to be strong and stand on her own feet, she also holds the responsibility of keeping positive family values intact. Educating a girl is equivalent to educating a generation and as a mother, her impact is phenomenal.

During my stint at this powerful institution, it was a conscious as well as a continued endeavour that girls from all walks of life - the tribal and backward areas in Gujarat as well as from developed nations like the USA and the UK rub shoulders with each other and live in continuous harmony and create invaluable synergies. Empowering them with key life skills of

communication, critical thinking, reasoning and problem solving; a positive attitude towards fitness, sports and other extra-curricular activities as well as sustainable self-defence techniques were a few integral pillars of their all-round education.

At Shanti Asiatic School...

Moving on to my professional journey in 2009, I wished to take my learning thus far and spread them wider. I joined the educational venture of the Chiripal Group, a leading industry house of Ahmedabad by being the Founder Principal of their flagship, Shanti Asiatic School (SAS). Within a short span of three years, the Shanti Educational Initiatives (SEI) has taken rapid strides focusing on education from Kindergarten to Post Graduation level. This automatically transcends into a broad based platform that functions as a significant change agent in today's education scenario. At present, SEI consists of over 80 pre-schools, 5 schools and 2 business schools in various parts of India. SAS provides all modern facilities and amenities that meets the needs and aspirations of modern day learners and has already been awarded the ISO 9 01:2008

(QMS) from Bureau Veritas.

Academic programme at SAS

The academic programme in our school is an outcome of intensive research and development and is a balanced combination of core academics and multiple intelligences. Special focus is given on foreign language learning to prepare students for global citizenship. Freedom of thought and expression and learning beyond books is encouraged through an enquiry based learning approach. We call this our own unique 'I' Learning Ladder.

The 'I' Learning Ladder has 3 steps to it. First is 'Inquiry' which describes a child's thirst for knowledge and information. Children enquire and investigate everything they see in their surroundings which highlights their basic characteristic of curiosity. 'Interaction' is the next step which continues with the spirit of inquisitiveness. Interactions are arranged for students with peers, teachers, experts, toys, tools or technology to unwind their curiosity where they can practically explore to understand the interconnections and interdependence of concepts. The last step is 'Innovation' which is an expression of creativity. It is a product of scrupulous effort to fulfil inquisitive thought and confident interaction. Innovation is boundless and is not limited to measurability and each creative expression is a new benchmark on the child's developmental continuum.

The school's core belief that a value based, creative and focused mind is the source of all power leads it to provide an education beyond academics. The school's vision to mould young minds into community leaders is already gaining a strong foothold as students are actively involved in several activities that sensitise community as a whole. This 'Prayaas' which means our community drive takes place through community workshops, discussions, field work on various national and global issues like nature conservation, cleanliness drive and child labour.

Charity walks, blood donation camps, 'Save the Sparrow' campaign and 'Each one, teach one' feature prominently on our list of activities.

In its bid to 'Celebrate Knowledge', the school's mission is to create a joyful school environment that will generate happy, righteous and quality individual equipped to make the right choices in life and grow up to be responsible citizens of the world.

Partnership with Parents...

Communication between school and parents is the key to a good relationship as parents are regarded as co-educators and plenty of opportunities are created for the home and school to work in tandem. Parents are encouraged to speak their minds clearly and get involved in the open environment of the school and they are pretty much aware of their 'Right to be heard'.



Some other distinctive features at SAS include:

- Theme based assemblies in the school's four houses, Prithvi, Jal, Agni and Vayu stimulate the students to think deeply on vital ethical and moral issues along the backdrop of our environment and interdependence in nature and its elements
- Student workshops by experts on a wide variety of coping skills and behavioural management give students that cutting edge

by which they can develop their potentials. Mind mapping, reading clubs, dynamic memory, managing change, aggression and anger management are a few of these

- Elections at SAS are organised to replicate the Indian electoral process. All details like filing nominations, declaring manifestos, campaigning through speeches and posters and finally casting the secure ballot in polling booths or e-voting to save paper are adhered to imbibe in the students the values and need of a participative democracy from early on
- The Investiture Ceremony that follows is an exercise in exaltation, envisioned to honour the child, the parent and the teacher. The mission is greater awareness of responsibility, service, honour, pride and privilege
- Exchange programmes with other schools, international and national trips, celebration of some key international traditions in their native way promote a respect for diversity in culture



- Sports are an integral part of the curriculum and training is provided in all major sports by expert coaches. Apart from this, exposure is given to novel and new age sports like golf, tennis, horse-riding, rifle shooting and swimming. Where indoor games are concerned, the mind-sport chess is given a special status
- 'Prabhat' is the annual platform to display multiple intelligences with special focus on

Science. Parents are encouraged to be a part of the learning community

- 'Aashayein' reflects the aspiration of our students and this annual day is devoted towards expression of creativity where we provide a platform for everyone to perform on stage. Working passionately, students learn about team work, patience, problem solving, creative solutions, time and event management
- 'Samarpan', the annual Grandparents day has a special significance as it is a warm event to pay respect to our grandparents who, over the years, have given us unconditional love, care and affection. The occasion always generates lots of emotion and is a mark of respect for the often, forgotten generation

We, at SEI firmly believe that education is what remains after one forgets all that has been taught. It is beyond academics. It is learning from life. With this as the core purpose, the focus is always on... The Future!!!

As a Mentor...

A few tips that I feel compelled to share with teachers and parents.

- Empower but do not Indulge
- Guide but do not Lead
- Work on your anger - Aggression Management Skills
- Passion and Compassion go hand in hand
- Show respect to all living beings and particularly, the environment
- And most importantly, Respect your child and give her/him the wish to learn. Then only would you have changed lives and made a difference. Keep this passion!

Some may be interested in finding a personal meaning, others in a fact leading to a conceptual understanding; some may want to know how things work and for others, self-discovery is paramount. Unless we are able to assimilate and incorporate all of these diverse needs, we might not be able to unravel the vast potentials of the human mind.

