

Maximizing Academic Excellence

Abstract

Swami Vivekananda said, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man" It is the means which empowers us to know how to learn and live purposefully. It helps us explore, define and find the true purpose of our life. But today it has become most complex and challenging issue. It is not just a local or a national concern but a subject of great deliberation worldwide.

Millions of students across the globe are facing the problems, there is a huge gap between the Taught and the Learnt. Schools are the mirror to the future; but our education system is still mirroring our past not in a position to guide us in the 21st century. And as a result students have lack of interest in studies, stress, lack of concentration, low self-esteem, purposelessness in life and depression.

Why this is happening?? According to me the simple reason behind all these all is the right kind of education which will help our children bring out the hidden potentials of their Body, Brain and Mind.They should be taught to know first and then to channelize these potentials into performances.

Keywords: Student's inner-Self, Understanding, Individual Growth Map, Self-Image Transformation, Consciousness, Pranayam, Meditation, Curriculum Matrix, Turning Potential into Performance, Massachusetts Genral Hospital in Boston, Synergic effect, Neurotrans meter, Affective Neuroscience, Affective Neuroscience, Hippocampus, Early Interventions, Learning and Life Skills, Early intervention, Emotional Cleansing, SHANA Smile Box, Anecdotal Records, Systematic memory , Learning management system.

Introduction

On an average, a child starts for school at the age of 2.5 years. He does not want to go to school. He feels the separation pang, does not want to be separated from the parents and home which used to be his only place. He cries, wipes his tears and cries again. Slowly and gradually he adjusts himself to the new environment and his learning starts. He starts doing his alphabets, numbers and lot of other stuffs without knowing why to do this or how to do this. He starts facing Comparisons at home, at school and other places. He is levelled by teachers and family members. He loses his playfulness, innocence and curiosity in the hands his teachers and parents because his parents are not having enough time to nurture his thoughts and his teachers are not well equipped to do so.

He tries to establish his identity in the crowd of 40-60 students in a class. Students grow up with all the psychological garbage that his environment has to provide. Child grows with an expectation from his teachers, parents and other members of his society to KNOW all but the reality is different for every child. He is not able to learn How to learn. He is served year after year with What to learn – the curriculum, syllabus, the book. He has least idea about why he needs to do all this or how he needs to do them. He is beaten, broken and banished and lives a life of outcast from his core of his heart. He grows with a Negative self-Image of being inferior. Some of them are able to do comparatively better than others and they have a sense of superiority and they fail to contribute anything positive in the society.

Aim of the Study

To explore and analyze an alternative ways of learning and experience their phenomenology of learning.

"We are students of words: we are shut up in schools and colleges and recitation rooms for ten or fifteen years and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words and do not know a thing."

These bitter lines about the present education system were said by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his book, "Essays Including Essays."



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The Human Capacities – The Maker's Gift

Scientific researchers have proved that our kids are gifted with immense potential. Our body has 7 octillion somatic cells with the capacity to recycle itself in every 7 years. Brain, the central processing unit packed with 100 billion neurons with the capacity to create one quadrillion synaptic connections where every new connection makes us more intelligent and creative. Our brain has phenomenal creativity and storage (memory) capacities. It can analyze and synthesize any information faster than the fastest super computers of the world. But the tragedy is after 15 years of school education, more than 97% of these super computers are crashed, bugged with social viruses, corrupted with psychic pollution and gets hanged when faced with little challenges of life. Most of them are unemployed, under employed and unhappily employed and becoming non-contributing citizens of the society.

Why this is happening? Why our school system is not able to turn the immense potential into performance. The reason is 99% of our schools focus their 99% energy only on WHAT to study (In completion of syllabus) but we only can produce great contributing leaders if we make our students independent learners who are empowered with art and science of learning i.e. mastery over How to learn and How to live beautifully.

After 14-15 years of research in education, I have seen that the most urgent need of the present education system is Learning and Life skills. This quest took me to SHANA International School where learning innovation is in action. The Learning and life skills are blood and bones of their curriculum. In this article I am throwing some light on the concepts and practices of Learnomatrix which can be replicated and established in any school of the world for satisfying educational experience for the whole humanity.

Learnomatrix – The Art and Science of Learning and Living

Learning and Life Skills are set of habits, principles, techniques and practices which help students to learn how to learn and how to live. It helps students to unleash hidden potential of their body, brain and mind to excel in exams and life. After researching for more than a decade I found that if we inculcate right method of Learning in practice instead of improved methods of teaching; the success rate of student increases manifolds. We have implemented a very scientific and systematic method of learning at SHANA International School which incorporates various techniques and tools of education psychology, Cognitive sciences, Neuro-Lingual-Programing, Pranayama, Yoga and transcendental Meditation. We love to call it Learnomatrix. It helps students to ease and accelerate learning processes thus resulting in maximum outcomes.

Understanding Student's Inner-Self

When a student enters into the portals of SHANA, he has to go through a psychometric testing which helps mentors to map the interest, aptitude, skill set and emotional state of the child. The parents are also interviewed to understand the family environment in which the child is living and to know what the beliefs that he carries about himself are. This insight helps mentors analyze the strengths and weaknesses

of the child and plan the Individual Growth Map accordingly.

So to make child learn parents and mentors need to understand child first. The other side of the coin is child also must know who he is and how his body, brain and mind are functioning. We have seen that once students have understand functioning of their brain and mind properly they produce better and greater results in exams and life.

Step-one is Self-Image Transformation

Unfortunately in our society children grow up with a negative self-image. Most of the time we make them realize what they cannot do which creates a negative self-image. At Shana, school tries to bring out the child from the negative conditioning which he is into due to his family or peer group. School makes him understand and realize his own immense possibilities and capabilities which help him to commit to turn his potential into performance.

Turning Potential into Performance

According to Kamlesh Chandra, Learning is the outcome of synergic effect of body, brain, mind and the level of consciousness. The best learning can happen when learner's body, brain, mind and consciousness are at the optimum level. *Yogasan* for body, *Pranayama* for Brain, *Meditation* for mind are the integral part of the SHANA Curriculum Matrix.

Surprisingly, meditation and learning are linked. New research shows that regular meditation changes the physical structure of your brain in powerful ways - including ways that improve learning. So what is the connection between meditation and learning? Studies at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston have shown that regular meditation causes the brain's cerebral cortex to thicken. This happens through an increase in the size of the blood vessels and the amount of blood flow to the region.

The cortex is the area of the brain responsible for the higher mental functions, so this is an amazing discovery. One recent study found evidence that the daily practice of meditation thickened the parts of the brain's cerebral cortex responsible for decision making, attention and memory. Sara Lazar, a research scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital, presented preliminary results last November that showed that the gray matter of 20 men and women who meditated for just 40 minutes a day was thicker than that of people who did not. What's more, her research suggests that meditation may slow the natural thinning of that section of the cortex that occurs with age. "Attention is the key to learning, and meditation helps you voluntarily regulate it," says Richard Davidson, director of the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin.

Meditation directly affect neurotransmitter and structure of the brain, changing it in ways that appear to increase attention span, sharpen focus, and improve memory. The evidence continues to grow that regular aerobic exercise can improve your memory. Your brain is your tool for remembering, so you have to make sure the brain has enough oxygen and other nutrients. Daily physical activity is one way to increase the flow of these to your brain.

It has been proven that building your aerobic capacity (through aerobic activity like running or

cycling) increases oxygen not only to your brain but to all your other organs.

When your oxygen is low, your ability to concentrate is hurt. When you can't concentrate, you can't learn new information easily or recall information you studied in the past. Many studies have shown that physical activity increases the flow of oxygen to your brain.

Exercise helps oxygenate (supply oxygen to) the brain. This supply makes it function better. Even walking 20 minutes a day will help you focus better. Researches done in the last ten years, show that intense aerobic activity actually grows new brain cells (neurons) in the hippocampus. The hippocampus is one part of the brain responsible for memory and learning.

In March 2007 a study by the Scott Small of the National Academy of Sciences showed that "a three-month program of vigorous aerobic exercise seemed to produce new neurons in this area, as well as improvements on tests of mental recall." This study found a 30 percent increase in the number of brain cells in the human participants. For the study, the participants were exercising intensely one to two hours a day, four days a week, on a treadmill or stationary bicycle.

Running is a very simple, no-fancy-equipment-needed way to get in 20 minutes a day.

It makes a huge difference. If I stop running for a week or two, which sometimes happens, I start feeling like dull within just a few days. Face it -we were not made to be sedentary couch potatoes. We were meant to move our limbs and gets the blood flowing. The brain is highly sensitive to this. Just try an exercise program for six weeks or so and just see if you don't notice a tremendous difference in your energy level and the quickness of your mind.

First, let me clear up a common myth: yes, you can grow new brain cells as an adult! The myth that your brain stops growing is false. Lots of new research proves that your neurons (brain cells) can put out new branches and make new connections no matter what your age.

Of course, all cells need nutrients to grow. So including brain foods in your diet gives your brain the building blocks it needs. More neurons and connections in your brain equals a stronger memory and a mind that simply works better. You have probably heard that sleep and memory are connected. Its true many studies have shown that not getting enough quality rest can directly with your memory. At night, your brain organizes what you learned during the day. As a memory study in the November 2006 issue of the journal Nature said, "contributes to the long-term consolidation of new memories."

According to another study, getting too few hours hurts memorization ability as much as no sleep at all! So to strengthen your memory, it is vital to get enough quality sleep each night.

Being sleepy hurts your concentration. When you can't focus on things clearly, you can't remember well. Sleeping poorly means the things you learned the previous day are not fully recorded in the memory parts of your brain.

According to Howard Nussbaum, a sleep researcher at the University of Chicago, a good

night's rest not only helps retention but can even help you recall thoughts forgotten during the day.

Tools for Becoming Better Everyday

They have devised various tools which help students in positive habit building because we believe that our capacities largely depend on the habits that we keep. Some of such tools are:

My Time My Life Sheet

The sheet designed to bring home the fact that our time is our life. It is filled and monitored by parents.

Log book

It records the learnings of the whole day. It is filled by students

Daily Diary

It encourages children to write about feelings. Summarizing the day in short in the way the child wants. The happy moments and the sad ones are all recorded in the daily diary. This is a personal diary which is not monitored by anyone. This helps to let out their emotions on paper thus helping them to come out of the pant up emotions.

I Compete I

The uniqueness and individuality of each is protected through this. There is no comparison between children by the school either in scholastic or co-scholastic fields. Parents are also encouraged to map the competencies of their child and help them to be better every day.

I Control I

At Shana school has, we have altogether discarded punishments – either physical or any other sorts. School believes that discipline if imposed by some outside authority is of no use. Children are the magic of self-control through I Control I.

The Paradigm Shift

Unlike traditional classrooms, teachers work only as a facilitator, listener and helper. Students engage themselves in various reading techniques like 5 Sense Reading technique. They also help their buddies in learning. No bell, no period system, practically no classrooms as students mostly love sit in open. No grades name, they have group names like Explorers, Initiators, Creators, Achievers, Passionators, and Reformers etc. There is no examination; all sort of assessments are called Happy Time.

Early Interventions

The students and teachers are given weekly Learning and Life Skills targets and each child's competency is mapped and reports are generated. This helps teachers to devise remedial measures for the students who are in the border line or low performance. This early intervention for problem diagnosis empowers teachers and students to fill the gap.

Emotional Cleansing

SHANA believes that emotional health of students plays a key role in making them good learners. The tools like SHANA Smile Box, Anecdotal Records, MTML, and Home room allows school to understand the emotional state of the children and set up counseling sessions for them. School goes for Individual counseling, Group counseling and Special Interventions with the help of Experts.

Intelligence vs. Memory

Our memory affects our ability to quickly and easily retrieve and apply stored information in situations when we need to solve a problem – and ability to solve problems is often defined as intelligence.

Human Memory is a very vast store of information and in most of the schools and educational institutions we don't train our students to use this natural capacity of their brains effectively. Without proper training students store information randomly in their brain and are not able to retrieve enough of that when required. For the smart and empowered new generation we must train our young students in scientific and systematic memory training programs so that they can effectively retain and retrieve important data to solve various problems offered by life from time to time for better decision making and problem solving.

For example, people who are seen as being good at math's are often able to solve problems in their head and the reason they can do this easily is because they can rapidly retrieve stored information which allows to solve the problem successfully. They are not necessarily more "intelligent" overall but rather, they are able to store mathematical data in their long-term memory and retrieve it quickly when they need it. However, the two are linked and improving your memory can help you to display what is commonly seen as "intelligence".

Following the Passion

Most of the children try to pursue career paths suggested by their parents or teachers irrespective of what they really want to do in their lives or what their true passion is. , it's important that school follows its passion. When school think about what is needed to be successful in life and its work, school we usually think about characteristics like value, talent, ambition, intellect, discipline, persistence and passion. The passion we have, or don't have, for our work should not be underestimated. Most of the times, this ingredient makes the biggest difference. Students must be allowed to follow their passion when they choose their career. This really makes a lot of difference in their life. Learnomatrix opens a lot of avenues for children as they are able to complete their syllabus in time. They are given exposure to different fields, they are able to choose for themselves what suits them the best. We provide them with the best of training and guidance in that field by the experts through the use of modern technology.

Use of Technology and LMS

In a typical high school a student has access to a teacher 40 minutes per day. That means she has access to that teacher 5% of her waking day, and even that time is shared with 25 classmates. She has access to the Internet 100% of the time. That's 20x better.

Technology is no substitute for an inspiring teacher. However, on-line materials are far more available. Using the "textbook plus classroom" approach, the places where learning can occur are limited. On the other hand, a wireless laptop has access to the teacher's course material and the entire Internet almost anywhere. This is also a vastly larger resource than can be practically carried on paper in a

backpack. Bottom line: information technology allows learning anywhere, anytime; not just in one particular classroom for forty minutes a day.

Technology allows the tables to be turned. Instead of teaching (push), students can be given projects that require them to learn (pull) the necessary material themselves. Key to this is the ability to get the information they need any time anywhere, without being in the physical presence of a teacher. This project-based pull approach makes learning far more interesting for the student. We have seen firsthand how students cannot wait to get out of regular classes to go to the after-school robotics project.

A learning management system (LMS) is a software application or Web-based technology used to plan, implement, and assess a specific learning process.

At SHANA we have observed remarkable improvement in children owing to the use of technology and LMS. Every child at SHANA is free to use technology for their day to day assignments, projects, research and Homework.

Conclusion

Conclusively, Indian education system requires certain changes at school and college / university level teaching. Poor schooling produces weak students that finally degrade our research and service standards. Therefore center and state governments are struggling for quality education. Education at Shana is an example of quality education. It tries to meet out the challenges of present time because it focuses on the core area of Childs socialization process.

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