

## 'We want...' – a collection of children's thought on education

Children and youth are very important stakeholders of the society which we often forget. Sometimes we create such a scenario and setup at home/school/society that children are forced to withdraw themselves from taking active participation in decision making processes. There are a number of organizations and individuals who are working actively for long to address this issue.

In this context, DRCSC had organized this one day event 'Aamra Chai' (We want...) with the objectives of sharing ideas and experiences of children actively involved in development process on 26th March at Seva Kendra, Kolkata.



In the first half, there were following sessions by the children

1. Village development plan in Bhaliaghati, West Medinipur with participatory resource appraisal method
2. Village development plan in Mirzapur, Birbhum with participatory resource appraisal method
3. Biodiversity register of Fatulyapur, North 24 Parganas
4. Children as change agent in Baduria, North 24 Parganas
5. Children promoting ecological activity in Julko, West Medinipur
6. Children promoting ecological agriculture in Bigha, Bardhaman
7. Protecting child rights at Kajla, East Medinipur
8. Street to school – experience of a slum child
9. Main streamed from brick kiln – experience of a child
10. Voice of a youth leader
11. Using film in the classroom – teacher's experience
12. An alternative school – Children's experience
13. School garden – teacher's experience





**This was followed by interactive sessions.**



This interview is taken from a 5 member panel with children which reveals the understanding of the children on aspects of education at large, followed by a discussion with the audience. The panel discussion was facilitated by Anshuman Das (Q – here, A is Audience). We tried to keep the dialogue intact.

Q] Did you have a good lunch?

A] Yes (a few)

Q] Can't hear you.

A] Yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeessssssss.

Q] That's better. Now, we have 5 panelists here. They will tell us – what we want in the school, what we want to study etc. Because, in most cases, we adults decide what YOU want, we do not consult you. Since this morning, that is what we had been endeavoring to - listening to you about your work – taking your suggestions – so that WE can learn something from you. I am Anshuman, which you already know. My role in this session will be to facilitate the process. Please introduce yourself and your school or centre.

F] Firdous Ali Paida from Madartala centre of DRCSC street to school programme.

AD] I am Aparna Dhara from Lake Gardens.

S] I am Sania Sultana from Dakkhin Chatra High School.

AN] Ador Naiya from Shikshamitra.

T] Tridib Bannerjee from Oriental Seminary.



Q] We have selected you in a manner so that there are representatives from every type of school. Like, Firdaus, unfortunately, he could not go to school, but he has been recently taken back to education after a long gap. Tridib is from a school, which is very famous, Oriental Seminary. Do you know, why it is so?

A] Tagore studied here. (Audience)

Q] Right you are, for how long?

A] 3 years?

A] 4 years? (Audience)

Q] I don't know, I mean I cannot recall. But I know that he had such an experience that he never went back to the school !

A] But he started a school himself. (Audience)

Q] Why?

A] Because he thought that school is necessary (Audience).

A] But not this type of school (Audience).

Q] Oh! You are making my job easy. I will come back to you on this. In our panel, there is Ador who is studying in an alternative school named Shikshamitra. We have heard about them in the morning session. And she is from a rural school, in a very beautiful village, called Chatra. She is from a girl's school near by. Now I come to the question that she asked. Rabindranath did not like his school. But do you like your school?

A] Yes (everyone nodded).

Q] Why?

C] I have many friends.

Q] and you?

F] Everyone from my slum goes to school, I also was going to school. But I had to leave the school because I had to work for my family. Now I have started going to school again ... I am liking it.

Q] Why?

(Silence)

T] I like to go because I learn so many things in the school.

Q] I will ask you what you learn from school – but now, let us finish this round.

AD] I do not like my school, but I go to school.

Q] I don't understand.

AD] I go because, I can meet friends, sometimes I like some classes.

Q] And you like fuchka and alookabli in the school gate in the tiffin break?  
A] I eat chips. (Audience)  
Q] I used to have icecream at 10 paise! And you did not respond.  
AN] I? I like because Shikshamitra is my school.  
Q] Ok fine, so whether you like it or not, you go to school. All of us go to school.  
A] All children do not go to school. (Audience)  
Q] You are right. All children do not go to school. It's unfortunate that in India, there are number of children who don't go to school. And the schools are unfortunate that they miss those children. But now I will raise the next, question. Those who are teachers here, don't beat me up. Sometimes, I feel that do we at all need to go to school? Those who did not go to school, they are happy enough.  
F] But this is not true. Most of the children who do not go to school, they are working, they are not happy.  
Q] But will they be happy if they go to school?  
S] At least they do not have to do hard work as a child labour. In our area, there are children who do hazardous work in recycling unit.  
Q] But that is illegal.  
A] Who cares? (Audience)  
Q] Ok, let me frame the question differently. Say, by choice, if someone doesn't go to school, is he going to miss something?  
T] He will not be able to learn many things. History... Geography...  
Q] Hmmm... history. Do you like history?  
AD] No I do not, I can't remember so many things.  
S] But it is important. We need to know about freedom struggle. The great men.  
Q] I have seen many great men, whose names are not there in the history books. There was an icecreamwala, who used to give free icecreams to us.  
AD] That might happen in your time, now that will not happen.  
Q] We were talking about history. Why do we study lives of great men? Because we want to learn lessons from them which might help us in our life. Ooops! I responded to the question. I was only supposed to ask!  
T] You are right.  
Q] What? Responding to the question?  
T] No no, you responded perfectly to why we study great man's life in history.  
Q] Anyone wants to add on to why we need to study history?  
S] All names written in the history are not necessarily of great men. There are villains too.  
Q] Right, but why do we need to study history?  
F] I do not find much point, but sometimes I like the stories. There are many films and story books on history, I like those very much.  
S] Books are so difficult.  
AD] And very big.  
Q] All books?  
AD] Particularly History books.  
Q] So which subject do you like most? Ador, you are not responding. I want to start from you.  
AN] You will laugh, if I respond.  
Q] Why?  
AN] Because, I would like to read only those things which I can teach to my children in future.  
Q] Well said Ador, see they are laughing .. but they are also clapping. We liked what you said. You said a very important thing. After that?  
T] I like .... I like ... all.  
Q] All?  
T] You have to, because, you need to study all.  
Q] Still, if any choice?  
T] Hmmm... then biology.  
Q] You are trying to please your biology teacher... because he is here!  
T] No no no... not like that, I like biology.  
Q] I will ask you later, why you like biology. But let us hear her favorite subject.  
S] Bengali  
AN] I like ... I like ... I will respond later.  
F] I like maths!  
Q] Huh! Good. At least someone likes maths. Why do you like maths?  
F] Because it is important to learn maths very well for your life.

Q] Audience, please note that, I will come back again to Firdaus's answer, 'what is important for your life'. Can I see hands raised for those who like maths? Woh! So many!! I liked algebra, but in the initial stage I had problem in grabbing the concept of algebra. But I had problems with arithmetic. I use to do arithmetic by applying algebraic formulas . But I liked Geometry very much. You want say something?

A] This is same for me sir. But theorems are sometimes so similar, that I get confused.

A] But I have never used those theorems in my life. (A senior person)

Q] Hmm... now if there is any maths teacher he will beat me after the programme is finished, you all have to save us then! From the subject let us discuss about teachers. What type of teachers you want?

S] I want teachers who have sense of humour.

Q] Why sense of humour?

S] We are so afraid of teachers!

Q] Why? Do they beat you?

S] No no... they are so grumpy most of the time. They do not listen to you.

Q] There are teachers here, who are listening to you for long, appreciated your work, and you are saying that they do not listen to you?

S] They are different. That's why they came here. But if we do say something outside the study, most of them do not listen.

F] Yes yes, my request, teachers should not mind, if we pull their legs.

Q] How can that be? You pull their leg and they will leave you?

AN] No, but sometimes we might laugh in the class, and the teachers never join, they pull our ears! Most of them are not friendly.

Q] Tridib you are not saying anything? Are you afraid of your teacher? Debashisbabu, do not listen to what he says.

T] No... teachers are very important, they teach us, guide us.

Q] But some of your friends sitting just beside you, were saying that teachers are not friendly.

T] Teachers need not be very friendly always. If you do something wrong, they have to guide you.

S] But friends also can guide us.

T] No... but I am saying that we know nothing, so they should guide us.

Q] You know nothing? That I can not believe. How did you learn walking? How did you learn eating? To play football? Who taught you?

AD] None, we learned it on our own.

S] But, there are many students in the class, who will control them?

Q] Police.

S] Police?!

Q] Yes, teacher's job is to teach and guide, you only have said that. Now you are adding one more – control. Who would control you and your friends while playing football?

AN] None.

Q] So, do you always fight? Don't you have any rules while playing amongst friends? So if you can have discipline in football ground, why can't you have discipline in the class? So do we need a teacher to control you? I am perhaps putting my thoughts in your mouth !

T] But who will guide?

Q] Do not ask me! I will not answer. My job is to ask. Ador, will you share something?

AN] Sometimes, we do not have any teacher in our class. There are instruction card. Sometimes, teachers gave us instruction in the beginning of the class. We do whatever is written in the instruction cards. We do call teachers if we need their help.

Q] Your school is a very special school, but I feel the same idea can be followed in the other schools too. I know Loreto Sealdah used to follow the same principle, I don't know what they are doing now. I was trying to draw your attention to another thing we mentioned earlier. Walking, running, cycling etc, the skills you have learned on your own - you have learned better, and you never forgot. Ador is talking about a system which is mostly a self learning system, where you don't need a teacher.

A] This is not possible, then who will teach (Audience).

Q] You yourself. Teachers will be there to help you. Seems you are not happy, but Ador has shared a similar system. What is the opinion of other panelists?

AD] May be it can be tried out. But if there is a teacher, who is friendly enough, there is no harm.

S] Sometimes, we read together with friends, I found that very helpful.

Q] Now, let us discuss another issue. Say you had been given responsibility to design a school. How will you do it?

T] It will be a big 3 floored building.

Q] Do we need a building for a school?

AD] Building is a necessary, how do you do classes without building?

Q] There are schools, primary centres, ICDS centres who don't have BIG buildings as you are suggesting.

F] That is because they do not HAVE money or resources, they are poor.

Q] The oriental seminary experience was so suffocating for Rabindranath, that later he built a school, which has no wall, no roof - just under the tree. Or maximum a small open hut. I studied in that school in Santiniketan. And I am proud of that 'poor' school.

A] But what happens if there is rain.(Audience)

Q] Oh! Don't ask me questions, ask them. Have you ever been to Santiniketan? (3~4 hands.) It is nearby, train travel is not so costly... try some time to be there. What else will you have in the school?

AD] Computers.

Q] How many?

AD] 5.

Q] That's all? Anything else? Air condition?

F] No, I need big windows, so that I can see outside.

S] And fans, we do not have fan in our school- it is very difficult in summer.

Q] Do you have fan in teacher's room?

S] Yes.

A] I want to have a school like our school. Big classroom, Less students, colourfull wall. (S)

Q] I like it that you love your school so much. No one told anything about laboratories, toilets! Do you have labs in your school? Oh! None of you? Ok. And what do you teach in your dream school?

T] Bengali, English, history, geography...

Q] Then how is your school different from others?

T] Oh, it has to be different?

S] We can do what ever we feel like.

AD] Then we will be taught whatever we need.

Q] What do we need?

F] Computers.

Q] Ok, let me help you. Which school taught you to climb a tree?

All] No one

Q] Which school taught you to swim?

AN] Our school.

Q] No. I am not talking about any alternative school. Any normal school?

All] None

Q] Ok. So tell me which school taught you to see a Dictionary? No. I am not talking about any alternative school or any centre. Which normal school teaches you to see a Dictionary? Tell me the name of the school.

All] None

Q] Ok. What else? Which school taught you to do your regular shopping and marketing?

S] Were taught in our 'home' school, our home -

Q] So if we do not get to learn all these in our school, what else do we learn? This is what we do everyday. So what do you all think could be taught better in school? What should be taught in school? Hmm... so everybody is thinking.

T] I think we should study everything in school because you never know what helps us in future.

Q] Hmm right...we do not know when and what helps us. Ok. What else? What do you all think should be taught in school?

AN] Sir I think a child who aspires to be a doctor in future knows that he has to study science properly. Similarly, a child who aspires to be psychologist in future should also get the opportunity to study a little bit of psychology with the other science subjects in school.

Q] So you are saying that a little bit of everything should be taught in the school. Ok. What else?

A] I want to say that the syllabus in the school should depend upon the desire of the students as well as the teacher. I am saying this because what the students want to learn is important, it is not always that all students want to learn the same things, it varies from student to student, and so the teaching department should be divided accordingly. It is not such that every child wants to study in the same way; some are good with games. It is not that only education can change a man's life. I think it will be best if the teachers sit with the students, ask them what they want to study and moreover if the teachers can observe a child and find out the subject or the matter he/she is interested in and guide him/her accordingly. I think only if a child is trained in what he/she is interested in; only then quality education will be achieved. (from the audience, a girl of age 16~17).

Q] She is saying that a child should learn whatever he/she is interested in. If, I like doing Maths, I will do Maths, but if I do not like it I will not learn it. Yah, some one else is saying something from there.

A] You are saying that we would learn whatever we want to, but how will that be possible? If we do not study properly in school, what job are we going to get? What are we going to eat? How do we earn our living? We need to study maths, science and some other subjects also in order to get a job, earn our living. (from the audience)

Q] Good. He is raising one question. What do we get to eat?

AD] I want to ask something to that Didi in the audience.

Q] Yah proceed.

S] You said the children should learn whatever they want to, like if I want to study Maths, I will study Maths and if I want to study English, I will study English. But if I keep on studying whatever I want to, then how will I pass? How will I be promoted to the next class? And if I want to study like this, then what is the need of going to the school? We can study at home. So what do you think should we go to school or sit back home?

Q] Good. 2 questions have come up from here, both of which are very important. But there is another comment from here. Yah, tell me?

A] I want to say that when a teacher is teaching something within the class, it would be better if he matches up his teaching with its practicability, because then only a learning can be made logical, otherwise not.

Q] Ok. So now we can discuss the 2 important questions that have come up from here. One is – he is saying that if we do not get any degree, what do we earn? How do we get a job? But my question is do we really need a degree to get a job? As far as I know, in India at least 60% people do not have any degree. So aren't they getting anything to eat? Are they still starving? So this is one question. Another question is - she is saying that if we do not study in regular school method, we shall not be promoted from one class to the other. What is the need to be promoted? Do you really need to pass? The same question of degree is coming up here.

S] If we do not pass, then how do we learn everything? When we are in Class I, we learnt A, B, C etc and then in the next class we learn something more.

Q] Then how does our school remain different from the others?

S] But if want to learn more, we have to go up from one standard to the other. If we restrict ourselves by learning only one thing, then the other matters will remain unknown to us.

Q] Hmm true. That is another question. We will discuss this again in future. Now we will go to the last question, as we have to end up soon. Many teachers at present, apart from teaching in schools do private teaching at home, although this is illegal. So now we would like to hear some of the opinions about this from you. Is it necessary or not? Say whatever you feel like.

S] Is the one who teaches us in school and the one giving private tuition the same person?

Q] The same sir might teach you at home, but I am spending 8 hrs in school and then do I need to rush for private tuitions after school? Then my question is - what is the need of going to school at all? We can directly go for only private tuitions.

T] Actually some people say its necessary and some say it is not.

Q] No. you talk about yourself.

T] Yes. I am talking about myself also. Let's say, in my class, when a specific topic is taught, I may not understand it, but whenever a teacher starts asking if we understood it or not, I say yes. This is mostly because I feel ashamed to say that I did not understand whatever she has taught, which my friends did. So back home, if I go for private tuitions, only then I am able to learn the topic well. It is only then taking private tuitions make sense, because we are taking private tuitions only to understand a matter well, which we could not understand in school.

AD] I think when something is taught in the class, we need to follow that well, and then if we revise it once more when we are back home, then we do not need to take any tuitions for that.

Q] But let me ask you one question. Tell me if a teacher is teaching something in the class, is it the responsibility of the child to understand it, or the teacher should make him understand? Whose responsibility is it?

S] If Sir is teaching something, the students should also try to grab according to their capacity and revise it again at home.

AD] Both of them bear the same responsibility. Teacher should make the effort of teaching properly, but the students' responsibility is also to pay attention and try to understand fully what the teacher is teaching.

Q] Ok. Anyone else want to say something?

S] Even I would say that in a class, it is the teacher's responsibility to make us understand everything, and we should also ask the teacher again and again if we do not understand anything. But what happens within a class, generally, is that, if we do not understand anything and ask the teacher, then most of the time teacher says we are not listening properly, we are not studying and so our guardians will be called. But if we don't understand anything, it is not our fault, and if the teacher constantly tells us that we are not studying, we are going no where

(*gollay jachho*), so then we stop asking anything in class and go to a private teacher for learning the subject well.

AN] I want to say something. The school where I have studied, i.e. the Sikshamitra School, is a bit different from others. We have 5 children in our class, now actually we are 3 of us. Here if something is taught in class, the teacher asks if we have understood the subject or not. Initially we were scared, but if we tell her that we did not understand what she was teaching, she would say “why didn’t you ask me before? If you do not understand anything, then always ask me, otherwise you will not be able to go beyond this.” Moreover whatever is taught in class, if we go through that once again when we are back home, then our job will be done. We also do the homework that is given to us.

Q] You want to say something?

F] I want to say that we, the poor children, are trying very hard to go to school and study. It is not always possible for us to go for any private tuitions as most of the time we have to strive for money. So it is our duty to work hard and try to learn everything that is taught in school and practice at home. But if at we fail to understand anything, we have to ask about it again and again for understanding the matter well.

Q] Does anyone else want to say something?

A] Yes I want to say something.

Q] For now we are going to take one question from here and one from there. And no more questions.

A] Two of my younger brothers are sitting there. I want to ask them one question. You are saying that you don’t need private tuition. But I want to ask you that when you reach the Graduation level, don’t you think that even if you attend regular classes, private tuitions would be needed to upgrade yourself? In junior classes homework and revising might help, but when you at a higher level, private tuitions become very important for better results.

Q] They haven’t reached that stage. So there is no point asking this question to them. Can we reserve this question for future? Yes. One more question. This would be the last one.

A] In some schools, there are small numbers of students, but in some others, the student pressure is too high. It is very difficult for the teacher to attend individual student and solve their problems. But there the role of the student is very important. If any student thinks that he knows everything – he doesn’t go to the class teacher. He goes to private tuition to know more.

Q] Well, the logic is not very clear to me!

A] I don’t know about the current situation, but I can say about our time. I have passed my college and university long before. I never had to take any tuition in my college days. Consciously or unconsciously, during our time, we did not need any tuition for doing our studies.

A] While in college we take up the subject we want to. Why would you have to take tuition for the subject you love, you will anyways study it on your own. Moreover the friends are there for notes and idea exchange and the understanding capability of a student also increases by the time he/she is in college.

Q] I think we can stop the panel discussion here if anyone else does not have anything else to say or suggest.

A] I was listening till now that many children were saying that they can not remember everything that is taught to them in class. Actually studying in school is not supposed to be like this. If one gets the opportunity to do practically what has been taught to him, then the student will not forget anything and this will come to his help some day or the other. I can say this from my own experience. I have learnt many new things in life while working. If we do not get anything to work out, then we can not even learn for e.g. Simplification. Teachers go through a long process teaching this and the children at times find out the simplest method of understanding it. Naturally most children find it difficult to understand and use simplification in the long run. So we need to practise everything that we learn theoretically. The problem is that – a syllabus and a time frame has been given to us, and we are forced to learn everything within that time. 15-18 years is the time period. This is supposed to be the learning time and rest of the life is to work that out. We have to come across these bindings. The things that we gather within 18 years of age might help us in future for acquiring a job, but that can never be called as a true learning. (from the audience.)

Q] So let us stop the session here.

A] Sir, I was raising my hand since long.

Q] Ok. Then put your point forward in the next session. We are stopping this session here. Just one thing to say; we do not go to school for learning. We go to school for passing from one standard to the other, from Class – VI to Class VII, Class VII – Class VIII. Actually this is my personal view, but I truly think that that we don’t go to school for learning anything new, we study in Class VI because we have to give the final exam of Class VI and move to Class VII. Anyways thanks to all of you who had participated in this session. Some one please come from the audience and handover the prize to the participants. So now that we have spoken so much about what we want and what we don’t, I would like to request Malini to come over here and reach to some conclusions through discussion about today’s topic.



**Last session by Malini Mukherjee (Q), the answer is mostly from the audience.**



Q] I am Malini. And Shahjahan, to talk in front of so many people, its not only your knees but my knees shake too. Even I get scared. Here many of you have come and said a lot of good things. I was noticing those who came up here. They were so good in whatever they said, that I got more scared. I was thinking all through that I can not speak as good as you, and moreover you can say that I am linguistically challenged. So from now onwards I will speak to you sometimes in English and sometimes in Bengali. Ok, so now tell me who all have not spoken till now, the ones who did not get the opportunity to speak, like me. Raise your hands. All of you have spoken? You didn't? Ok, so from now on we'll speak. We will discuss everything' like what you like, what you don't, what you had written in the chart paper at the back, what you all want etc. But first of all we'll do one thing. We will fight verbally. Tell me who all can fight well? I can fight really well. I heard some of you are doing resource mapping and to do that you all are having discussions with the Panchayet members also. Somewhere the Panchayet members are vehemently opposing this idea of resource mapping; there you have to fight with them in order to make them accept your planning. So I know that some of you can give a tough fight today. But today you have to fight with me. In the morning when I was coming here, I had made up my mind that I need to come to terms with you all regarding some matters. And that is mostly because I am a teacher. No, I am not a teacher in the strict sense of the term but, at present, the kind of work that I do has a direct connection to what the teachers. So naturally I can understand what kind of problems a teacher undergoes in order to teach properly. And now I will tell you about those problems faced by a teacher and you will have to defend yourself and prove, by fighting, that whatever I am saying is right or wrong. The teachers present here please raise your hands. The teachers are on my side. Ok, my first point of fight is that – what is this learning all about? Some of you are doing kitchen garden, some are drawing village maps, some are finding out local ecological problems. But tell me one thing - is there anything of this sort in our govt. or private school text books? Do we get to know from these text books what a kingfisher eats, what is the food habit of an ant? No. then why do we learn this?

A] I know we do not have anything of this sort in our text book. But we should not learn only the things which are there in the text books, we should learn practical things also. Anything that we learn from anywhere is considered as real learning. For e.g. a person who goes to school is educated and the one who haven't gone to school is illiterate. I beg to differ with this. I think whatever work a person is doing, he is a master in that, which means that the idea that only bookish knowledge makes one educated, it is not so.

Q] Ok. If I am your school teacher and I agree to teach you all this, even then your parents would not accept this. They would start asking – Why aren't the teachers going by the text books, why no exams are being taken? They would be angry. What will you do then?

A] That is why the NGOs are needed.

Q] Ok. So a NGO is needed. But how to convince your parents? The teachers and even the children would do nice things like Environmental studies, make new chart posters, plant trees etc. but the parents will not listen to this. How do we convince our parents? Great, I have almost won this fight. Does anyone else want to say anything?

A] We cannot convince them today, but we will do that tomorrow for sure.

Q] Ok fine. Anyone else wants to say something. Someone who haven't spoken till now?

A] Yes Mam. I think we need some time to convince our parents. For them, whatever we are studying, and we will achieve is important. They want us to get a good job from whatever we study. But in the mean time we need to understand from our teachers what our ultimate objective is? We know that this kind of activity would definitely bring some benefits to us. But first of all, we ourselves have to understand that, and it is only then that we can convince our parents. And then they will also acknowledge our hard work or our interest in this.

Q] But who will make a synthesis between a teacher and a parents' mode of thinking?

A] We can make them understand through awareness programmes like drama. This is a very popular medium of awareness; and in villages the community gets motivated to a large extent by these dramas. Through drama parents can easily understand what their children want to tell them. And finally they would allow their children to be what they want to be. And this is how they would make able future citizens.

Q] Able future citizens. What do you mean by that?

A] Like the one you are.

Q] Oh. Thank you. Anything more?

A] At first when I started working with my village based eco group for the protection of our environment, my parents were not supportive at all. But gradually when they saw that I loved working in the group, and something positive was coming out for the village development from the kind of work that we do, my parents also started supporting me. Now they completely like the work that I do.

Q] Oh that's really good.

A] My mother was a bit clever, whereas my father did not have much intellect. My father used to force my 12 year old elder brother to go to the fields and work with him. But my brother wanted to go to the school and study. So father used to beat and scold him everyday and drag him to work with him. But my mother was always in favour of my brother.

Q] So what happened after that? Did your father understand?

A] After repeated conversations with him, my mother was able to convince my father, and so now my brother can go to school everyday without any problem.

Q] Ok. So finally we are able to make our parents understand our needs and wishes. We are able to work with the Panchayet also for the betterment of our village. But what do we do if we have our school exams at the time of doing such extra curricular activities?

A] I think the only solution to this can be – to study in such a school where there is no such system of education.

Q] But if there is no exam at all, then how do we measure what we have studied? There has to be some way out for this. What do you think?

A] Yes obviously. You are right. But measuring our learning does not necessarily mean that we have to give exams. If we learn something properly and are able to teach that to someone else in a good way, then that proves for sure that we have actually gathered some quality learning, which we can impart among others. For e.g. I have been giving training to other children for the last few years. First I had learnt something from my school, which I tried to impart among others. This was my exam; no such written test to test my knowledge. On the other hand, if I had given written exam, passed well, but could not teach that to anyone else, would that have been useful? I don't think so.

Q] So you are saying that in order to test one's knowledge, we do not always need to take written exam. Ok. We need to understand the importance of this. Can we have a govt. school teacher here with us to say a few words about this? Are you a teacher?

A] No. I am not a teacher. But I work with govt. schools and school teachers on a regular basis. And I think that the present problem is that the school teachers as well as the parents do not want to think differently. They get used to the same routine and also force the children to follow that same routine in their life. Like, a teacher thinks exam is the only medium of measuring a child's knowledge, whereas the parents decide what their children would be in future and force the child to follow that. They never think what the child wants, they never think that a child can also have a mind of his own and determine his own way of functioning in life.

Q] True. I agree with you sir. I am really grateful to DRCS for arranging such a programme where the children are able to raise their voices and give their opinions. But I personally have seen such schools where the children or the teachers can never ever think of the kind of work that you have presented today. You all have done such nice work that I am overwhelmed. While in schools, I have heard many people say that they do not have any time for all this. They often raise the question – Where is the time? And then somewhere in a workshop I heard

about 100 headmasters saying the same thing that they get so less money that even if they want to do something like this, they are not able to do that because of the lack of money. Anshuman said that as less as Rs. 30 is also enough a contribution for making a garden in the school. So I would like to request DRCS that in future if they arrange any such programme, to invite more children, govt. school teachers and other officials who do not get the opportunity to do such work to participate in such a forum. Also the B.Ed institutions must also be linked up with this, because they are responsible for making new teachers for schools. And this kind of work that you all are doing for the community is something very rare.

I was going through the wish list that you all have written in the board at the back. I have noted some of your wish list which I will discuss here with you and try to find out a solution. Although some wishes are out of the education system, but I am not at all saying that these are not important. In fact some of these wishes like – a world full of bio diversity, abolition of dowry system and “say no to child labour and child marriage” are very important issues that have come up. There are other wishes like less pollution, no use of chemical fertilizer etc. But apart from all this, there is something like – ‘I want to spread the kind of work that I am doing and let others know about it.’ I have liked this very much. I will again say that this is not only the responsibility of DRCS, but I would like to request every single child here, who is working with any organization or considers himself to be socially conscious, must take the responsibility of sharing these kinds of work with other schools, children and people outside their working area. Another wish that has come up is that – ‘I want that all children in my country to go to school from tomorrow onwards. This is my wish also. ‘I will work as a domestic help, but after completing my studies in school,’ and one more wish that has come up – ‘our views/suggestions should be considered.’ I think this is a very important wish that have come up in conglomeration with today’s programme. Today’s programme was all about what “We want?” All of us present here today want that the children should also work for a better future, whatever we do, we should also take the suggestions of children. Today in fact the last session was all about what children want in school. Even I wanted to find out from your feedback what you all want from your school. As some of you have said, a school might have a building and some said a school need not have a building. So it seems almost all of have some thing to say about how his/her own school would be. Here is another such wish which says that – ‘every district should have a model school.’ I don’t know who has written this, but I think this is very important in today’s condition, although I don’t know whether it is actually possible or not in practicality. Here again two have written that such programmes like today’s should take place more and more.

A] I have written that point of a model school. (a senior person (woman) from the audience. )

Q] Ok. So can you please explain here why you have written this?

A] Yes I will. Actually according to me the education system then and now have changed a lot. In our time we had ample time to study with very less scope. But now-a-days, a child has very little time but has to catch up with lots. So our main focus should be to create a model school where in less time, we can build up a child with a bright future ahead. And that school should also include some suggestions coming up from the children for betterment. Today a child whose age is 5years learns many more things than a child of 10 year old 25-30 years back. So we have to keep this in mind when we talk about a model school and formulate it accordingly.

Q] So now I am taking this opportunity to ask all the children here – Do you all have anything to say to the ones who write our text books? Something like – “We want this, we want that etc.” Yes – you want to say something?

A] Actually all of us are going to school now-a-days, but many of us do not learn anything from school. If we had actually learnt anything from school, then not so many would have become terrorists or anti-socials. What is the benefit of such education which makes us go against the society and harm people like us? I think somewhere the problem lies with the schools also. The schools must have some kind of education based on humanity, so that when we go out of schools, we can become “real human.”

Q] Ok. So you want to say that the schools should have education based on humanity. Nice thought. Anything else?

A] Our school premise does not have any trees, so I want my school to plant more trees in future so that when we teach about the plants to our children, they can themselves go, touch and feel those things about plants as a part of practical teaching.

A] I want my school to be red in colour and want a games room where we can play carrom in our leisure time. School does not necessarily mean that we would keep on studying all the time.

Q] Ok. So you want indoor games in school. And what about the outdoor activities?

A] Yes. There should be a playground outside the school.

Q] Anything more? It is not necessary that you have to say it now. Today we have discussed a lot of things and much valuable information have come out of this. Tomorrow do you all have school? Ok . If you have school tomorrow and you have to tell one thing to your teacher that you want in your school. What would it be?

A] I want to tell sir that I want to go to a good looking school.

Q] And what do you mean by a good looking school? What would be the colour of the school?

A] It would be red in colour.

Q] And would you like to plant trees surrounding your school?

A] Yes.

Q] What trees?

A] Rose plants.

A] I would like to plant those kinds of trees surrounding our school which would grow big and would be able to give us more oxygen, mostly the fruit trees like mango, guava etc. which have multiple use.

Q] Only trees? Anything more?

A] No ma'm. Our school should have a compost pit within the campus where we can put the vegetable and fruit peels for making organic compost, which then we can use for the plants. It should also have a playground and a good library.

Q] So who do you all want to make visit to your school other than the teachers?

A] Only teachers and students.

Q] Oh!!!! So you don't want anyone else to visit your school?

A] No.

A] My centre is very good. It allows everybody to enter the campus. But even then I want one of my friends, Puja Roy to come and see the kind of school we are studying in. Puja has been sent far away. It is not always possible for her to come and meet us. I really miss her and want her come back and study with us (a small child).

Q] Oh!!! Even we got depressed with what you shared just now. Anyway, I hope your friend comes back soon. And I also wish that in the schools, resource persons from every section of the society with different skills could come up and teach something new every time. Today I really had a great experience here. We learnt a lot of things from you. We shall get this documented and send them to you for more feedbacks. I end up this session by thanking Service Centre as well you, the children of today.

*The report has been compiled by Education Team and published by DRCSC ([www.drcsc.org](http://www.drcsc.org))*

*The organizations/schools/children present there are partners of Indienhilfe, Save the Children, DRCSC, Bichitra Pathshala, ENRE, Sahay International. The event was supported by NCRI, Hyderabad.*