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Classroom Management in Digantar School

Digantar Vidyalaya is an example of transformation in the education system. It has made possible the development of autonomous learners, democratic teachers and rational humans. Some of the observations:

1. Classroom's Physical Structure: The learner is put at a disadvantage when the classroom is over-crowded, dark and damp. However, the classrooms in Digantar are spacious, well-ventilated and adequately lighted. There is no door and one of the four walls is $3/4$ th built, allowing people to see what happens in the classroom from outside. Moreover, there are no chairs and tables for the students and the teacher. It makes the mobility in the class possible. It also allows interaction between the teacher and the student and among students. (Didn't see any

differently abled student in the school).

The classrooms have a cupboard and shelves to keep all of their material, such as their textbooks, art files, bags, etc. The material displayed on the walls (like charts, cards, etc.) was made by the teachers. All of this is used by the teachers and the students. However, the upper part of the shelves makes books out of reach for ~~the~~ some students.

2. Learning based on the levels of the students: The children are not divided into forced homogenous class. Children are divided into groups based on their levels of learning. It is believed that the students have their own pace of learning and hence, the levels change according to the child's pace.

3. Responsibility: It is the responsibility of both teachers and students to take care of the classroom belongings.

Hence, cupboard books, charts, colours and other materials are accessible to each child. This ensures a sense of belongingness among students. For eg. - The students were very particular on how they were turning the page of their books.

4. Dignity of labour: cleaning the school as well as the classroom was a collective responsibility of the whole school including the administration. Moreover, the drinking water and washroom facilities were same for the whole school unlike in a few schools where it is separate for teachers. This ensured equality in the school in terms of accessibility, facilities, and even rules and regulations. Mahatma Gandhi, too, laid emphasis on the cleanliness and taking care of the place where you spend most of the time.

5. The Teacher: [Role of teacher and Teacher-Teacher Relationship]
The teacher is a motivator and a facilitator. For eg. - The teacher asks

- the students to solve questions themselves. The teacher would give hints whenever necessary but lets the child engage in the assigned task and find answers herself/himself.
- The teacher is democratic and egalitarian in his values and social concerns. For eg. - while interacting with one of the teachers, we realised how there were caste differences initially and how it took time to establish that everyone is equal. It was possible only because the teacher felt it. Also, the duties assigned weren't biased. Each student was assigned some task to do.
 - The teachers learn from each other, help each other, check each other, share their achievements and setbacks, etc. This helps to make the teaching - learning environment effective. (This was got to know by interacting with a teacher).
 - The teacher gives individual attention to each child where s/he discusses the work done the previous day and discuss about

the current task too.

- The teacher also accepts multiple perspectives.

For eg. - When two girls came to resolve a fight with the third girl in our "Sannuh", ~~the~~ the teacher along with the rest of the students listened to ^{what} each of them had to say on their part and he wasn't biased towards any child. (pg-

(We observed that all the discussions that took place in the class were open to different interpretations and experiences of the child).

So, the teacher gave a lot of importance to discussions (आद-आद, as they said) where it was believed that any conflict can be resolved by talking about it. So, all the conflicts were resolved in the Sabhal that happened everyday.

These discussions were not only about conflict resolution, but was also used in the teaching process where social content of the child was seen important. It encouraged personal experiences of the students and the teacher never imposed his/her

Opinion on students.

6. Autonomous Learners: Digantar Schools had autonomous learners where
- children were involved in decision-making. This was seen during their "Sabhas", where the students decided what they wanted to discuss about.
 - children were independent. Not every work is done by the teacher. They use the materials themselves when they realise its need. Moreover, they conduct the Sabha themselves.
 - They are self-aware of the classroom ethos. The rules are made by students only. They know their limits and objectives of doing a task.

7. Instructions: Importance of instructions was felt to manage any classroom. Be it the teacher or the student, instructions were given ~~to~~ before starting any task. So, even when a child wanted to recite a poem, the child would ask other children to repeat after every line giving

clear instructions.

8. Peer learning and self-correction: Initially the students would try solving, say a Maths problem, by themselves. Later s/he would ask the peer automatically and asking the teacher was the last thing. However, some students would approach the teacher directly too, but the teacher wouldn't tell the answer directly. Self-correction was seen when the teacher gave them some Math problems to solve and then, asked the students to check themselves. Also, peer learning and peer correction was seen within and outside the levels.

9. Negotiations: Instead of simply agreeing on a point, the students negotiated and came to a solution / conclusion together. Space for negotiations was given in the "Sabha". (सभुए)

10. Non-threatening Environment: The classroom environment that is conducive for learning, is the non-threatening environment where

- Specific rules were made by students.
- Clear limits for unacceptable behaviours are established.

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- (There is a Bal Panchayat for the same, elected by the students).
- Students' responsibility for their own behaviours is enhanced.

11.

Attention span of the child: Maria Montessori herself observed that a child would continue working if it's of his/her interest despite disturbances. The same was observed in the classroom there. Even though there was a lot of disturbance in the classroom, the children continued working. Even when the teacher was writing on the board, the students were looking at the board and working in their notebooks. (Assumption - The students would make noise until the teacher shouts). Each child was engrossed in his/her individual / pair / group work and didn't bother to look what the others were upto.

12.

Teacher - Student Relationship: The teacher was not seen as an authority but as a facilitator.

- It was an informal relationship where the teacher was also an emotional supporter and was involved in the family discussions (relevant to the child mostly) too.
- The students would call teachers with their names (followed by "ji", and yet the respect didn't vanish. When asked one of the teachers, he said that respect wouldn't come by calling Sir/ma'am; It comes from within.
- The teachers gave appropriate freedom to the students. Freedom to make an opinion, to question the rules, to make own rules, yet it was controlled in terms of what needs to be taught in the classrooms.
- The notion of discipline isn't remaining silent in the class, But it is about self-discipline. The students didn't have any monitor, yet they were disciplined and knew when to discuss, when to talk, when to play or when to leave the

classroom.

- The teacher-student relationship was enhanced through bringing in the concept of constructive feedbacks. The students would appreciate or tell the areas of improvement; so would the teacher. For example, for the 'embroidery' session, the teacher gave feedback to each student telling them the good things and giving the suggestions using the right words. [उन्हें वो ऐसे भी कर सकते हैं।]

13. Curriculum and Pedagogy :

- The classrooms were child-specific with a lot of charts (Some were at the eye-level while some were not.). The charts were mostly made by the teachers.
- The teacher plans what is to be taught everyday, understanding the needs and abilities of each child and mentioning the goals. Moreover, the teacher would also mention in their plan if any child needs attention in a

- particular task.
- No examinations were conducted. The level of the child keeps increasing according to his/her growth.
 - Social Context → Folktales are collected from the community and no concept is alienated. It is linked from their life.
 - Process model is followed where the focus is on how the task is done, rather than the correct answer.
 - Skill-based classes were conducted where children learn pottery, carpentry, clay modelling, etc. (Gandhi ji and Dewey laid emphasis on hands-on experience and skill-based learning).

Apart from the above, students are also encouraged to participate in co-curricular activities like play, dance, music for their holistic development. The concepts taught are not mechanically transferred, but children learn by making meaning, participating actively in the

classroom and looking at things critically.

Another important point for classroom management is the scope for improvement for teachers, which can happen through self-reflection. The teachers are also seen reflecting on the day and sharing the positives, successes and the shortcomings with other teachers.

Last, a lot of enthusiasm was seen in the students, teachers and administration. For a class to be successful, if I (as the potential teacher) enjoy the class, my students will enjoy it too, leading to a joyful learning.

Add-Ons

* Student - Student Interaction:

The students would help each other, in tasks, in managing the materials, and during speaking. They would ask the friend to speak in the class by motivating them.

The teacher too would encourage students to interact with each other. Hence, a friendly environment with peer learning, peer talks, peer correction was seen in the classroom.

* Core Foundations that make the teaching - learning environment positive.
As mentioned in the report previously, the freedom given to the students, the equality in terms of caste, class, age, religion, the respect for individuality and the basic education [cleaning of the surroundings on your own] lay the core foundations of a positive teaching-learning environment.

- * The kind of questions posed and the nature of questions focussed on
- the understanding of the child
[$2 \times 4 = 8$ कैसे आया ?]
 - making the students think
[आपको ऐसा क्यों लगता है ?]
 - the experience and context of the child [क्या आपके घर में ऐसा होता है ?]

Wait time was given to the students to think, discuss and then answer. Sometimes the discussions would not ~~to~~ come to the conclusion and the students were posed with questions to think.

- * Like mentioned above, thinking time was given for the questions posed. In terms of free time given, there was a ^{short} break of 5 minutes after first two periods where the students would do whatever they wanted to, and a long break of 50 minutes at noon for their lunch and play time. But if we see the schedule for the whole day,

The day of the child depended on the plan schedule of the teachers. They would clean the classroom early in the morning and then would have a sabha followed by classes planned according to the teacher. However, this was not very rigid and could change according to the needs, like the time of the task would extend if it isn't completed.

- * Achievements and Success in Learning
Because of no examination system, it was believed that each child's growth is individual and hence, achievement and success depended on how much the child has grown. The focus is given on the process of learning rather than the product / outcome. The child is neither over appreciated nor under appreciated and the child learns for himself / herself.

- * Assumptions about Teaching, Learning, Knowledge, Content
1. The child is learning for himself / herself and is responsible for it.

2. Knowledge is constructed by the child
 3. The teacher is not the authority and the child is not subservient to the teacher.
 4. There is no distinction between the school and out-of-school knowledge.
 5. There are different levels and pace at which a child learns, which depends on the cognitive level, experiences of the child.
 6. The child has the experience of his/her own life which will help the child in learning.
- * Teacher - Student Ratio in the class : 30 ~~to~~ students : 1 teacher.