

# Children's Learning and Social Context

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Education is the process of making children strong and sensitive human beings so that they can lead a meaningful life. They should be able to work for the betterment of society and see their role in bringing positive changes globally. So, every teacher should be aware of the fact that while the child in his/her class is an individual, she/he is also a part of the society and needs to develop accordingly.

Whenever I go to schools and meet fellow teachers, there is one thing that always pops up: there are 'some' children who cannot learn. And when you look for reasons, the kind of reactions that emerge seem to defy the fact that these children are human beings. The child is a part of this very society, who interacts here and develops mentally and socially. Then how is it possible that some children are not able to learn?

If we look at the beliefs related to the learning of children, we find that our social system is responsible for it. Our society has a particular type of structure that consists of groups of people belonging to various castes, religions and economic backgrounds and on the basis of this, their learning capacity is decided from the time they are admitted to the school. When this belief penetrates the hierarchy of society the focus on teaching and learning dilutes and attention gets shifted to the socio-economic conditions of the children and our efforts decline.

When it comes to children, I can say from my experience that we place them at the bottom in the hierarchy of society, perhaps even below women. We often hear in schools that 'this child will not be able to do anything; he does not have the capability'; or, 'he will not learn like this, beat him black and blue'. The expectation in society that our child should get better marks than the other children, the comparison and the humiliation create a suffocating atmosphere in which many lives get buried. In such an environment, we do not take the initiative to teach and learn. Children are an important part of human society; they also have all the human qualities that are there in adults. Then why is it that some children are not able to

learn?

Economic disparity further widens this gap. Even today, a large section of our society hardly gets two meals a day and there is a lot of struggle even for that in some families. The children from such families feel that taking care of the needs of the family is their responsibility and they begin to work for it. Many children help their families and are absent from schools during the time of paddy harvesting, peas picking or potatoes digging.

At this point, I want to share an incident. Some of us used to go to a school in Uttarakhand on a regular basis for the preparation of *Baal Shodh Mela* and would meet the members of the community. We interacted with them frequently. Their faith grew deeper in us. They told us that it is for the first time that someone has come to meet them and is talking about their life and profession. Most of the members of this community beg for a living. They said that usually, people do not want to give money to adults, so they have to take children with them against their wish. They also said that they understand the value of education.

Premchand wrote in 1936 that, 'There is no section of society that does not know the importance of education, so there must be a real constraint that they are not sending their child to school.' I am not justifying children's absence by saying so, I am only trying to understand it in a sensitive way. Is there a way by which we can adopt a different process with such children? We should do something so that children consider the school as their own. We should understand and respect the ways their family and community earn money for their living. Some processes may have to be done outside the classroom, but we can make those a part of it and new initiatives for teaching can be taken up.

It is necessary to change some of our beliefs as well as find some new avenues, for example:

- First of all, we have to stop comparing children; or form an opinion about them and label them on the basis of their social and economic backgrounds.

- Every child has the ability to learn irrespective of their background, provided they have similar, varied and enjoyable ways of learning. Efforts should be made to see that the schools accept all children, make them a part of their setting and break all the old beliefs. We have to believe that children will learn if they get proper respect and support.
- There is a need to pay more attention to the process, rather than the number of children who get success by memorising question-answers. It is more important to develop creative thinking in children. And to do this, various types of teaching activities can be started in the school, such as connecting the subject to the environment of the children, inviting community members in the classroom for interaction etc. We need to encourage children and the learning process both. The experiences with some of our schools suggest that this process not only helps to further the learning process of children who were left behind for some reason but also encourages

their enthusiasm to attend school. The biggest disappointment is that we do not take part in sports with a spirit of sportsmanship but start competing and rivalry. The form of sports will change if one participates in it for happiness and enthusiasm. It helps in developing brotherhood and reduces social distortions. It also weakens the shackles of caste and gender.

- We must believe that the teaching profession is different from all other professions and teachers should treat children with sensitivity. The teaching profession is the process of preparing a new generation and the community sends children to school having faith in that process and thinks that the next generation will move ahead from where it is today.

So, if we all have such enormous responsibilities, then obviously our scope of work is also huge and for that, we have to continue to work together to push ourselves forward, only then we will be able to create a sensitive, rational and reflective society.



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