

UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENCE

The classroom, as we know it, is not just a physical space filled with benches, desks, tube lights and a blackboard. It is an intellectual space where ideas are discussed; it is a social space where we interact with each other; it is an emotional space as well where we see a range of emotions from happiness and enthusiasm to aggression and anxiety. Knowing this, what kind of a space do we want to create in our classrooms and how do we build such a space...This was the topic of discussion on January 7th at the Mudaliarpur Teacher Resource Center.

Jyothi Ravichandran, a psychologist and professional counsellor from Shishu Vikas Trust, Chennai, facilitated the session. Read on for a summary of the discussion

Adolescent Needs -

Children misbehave. However, they misbehave for a reason and a lot of it is a cry for help. The first step towards problem solving lies in being able to identify the root cause of the problem. On close observation, the teacher will be able to identify any pattern to the behavior there may be and hypothesize the reason behind it. For example, does the child act up before an exam? This could indicate that the child is anxious/nervous. This hypothesis will tell us what we can do to reduce the behavior. Adolescent misbehaviors can be put under

three broad categories. It could be an issue of Autonomy, Belongingness or Competence, often referred to as the ABC of adolescent issues.

Autonomy - Autonomy is the need to be independent. Adolescents are trying to build their identity and want to be able to make their own decisions. One way to work around the issue is to involve students in the decision making process, such as setting norms for the class. Allow students to decide the date of assignment submission or the rules the class must follow.

These norms can be pasted on the wall so that they serve as a common reminder.

Belongingness -

Another common issue that adolescents face is lack of belongingness. This sense of belonging is reflected in the degree to which students feel that they are cared for, respected and

connected to other students and their teachers. Observe if the child is often alone, cut off from others. This can be reduced when the child engages in group activities, bonds with peers and has a trustable adult in his/her life.

Competence - The third category is a lack of competence. When a child is not able to perform and lacks self-confidence, it becomes an issue of competence. Encouraging the child to work in areas of strength and giving prompt



non-judgmental feedback will help them build competence.

When I first met my students, they looked a bit dull and lazy to me. They were not interested in doing any work. I observed them for a few days and decided that I had to work towards changing their attitude; I had to win them over. At first, I decided to be a little strict. I would ask them to get parents' signature for assignments and classwork. I soon realized that this was not working because that they had found ways around it. Then I switched my strategy. At first, I asked each bench to come and perform in front of their class. After a few presentations, I felt that a few children were not actively involved in the group. Therefore, I asked each one of them to present an original idea individually. It could be anything of their choice, but it had to be their idea. Every day, two students would present their idea to the class. Children came up with so many innovative ideas. They taught their friends how to make baskets out of newspaper, demonstrated the working model of a lift, simulated a military tank and made creative vegetable carvings, night lamps and so many more. Creating such a space brought out their innate talent; the ones who were weak in academics had some marvelous ideas. It has brought an attitudinal shift in them, and I have been able to get them interested in studies as well. In my experience, I see it working...that the best form of learning happens when students' learn out of their own interests.

- Sugumaran. E, GHSS Alankuppam



eight intelligences are logical, visual, verbal, kinesthetic, musical, naturalistic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. There are specially designed questionnaires that can help us find out more about our students and ourselves. This would give us greater advantage in designing tasks that suit different learning styles. For instance, a child who is strong in interpersonal intelligence would enjoy assignments that involve self-reflection. Such children would enjoy tasks like maintaining a diary/blog, writing about their personal heroes etc. A child who is stronger in interpersonal would like to be engaged in group activities and learn from their peers. A kinesthetic child learns more when they are physically involved in the activity. They enjoy making models and working with their hands. It is easier for visual children to understand lessons through diagrams, flowcharts, pictures and for logical ones to work on problem solving.

Identifying Strengths - The Multiple Intelligence theory is a good way to understand one's individual strengths and learning styles. This theory states that intelligence is of eight kinds and each individual's intelligence is a combination of these eight in different proportions. The

Social Emotional Learning - Emotions can motivate or demotivate learning. Yet, emotions are not discussed as explicitly as we discuss any other subject. We know and have often experienced that people may forget what we did and what we said, but it is very hard to forget how we made them feel. Our students will also

remember how we made them feel. To motivate their learning, we need to create more and more positive experiences for our students.

Channelizing Emotions - How do we help children channelize their negative emotions? For example, how do we perceive anger...? When we see it as repressed or uncontrolled emotions, our response is to curtail it by being strict or violent. What would be our approach if we look at anger as the need for justice... The anger is also telling us that we are going towards problem solving, that the issue matters and we need justice. Helping a child recognize the

positive aspect of an emotion, and guiding them to use it appropriately can turn around the young minds.

A core lesson for the students is that no emotions are bad or wrong. One simply needs to be aware of them as they exist for a reason and tell us something about ourselves. Students can learn effective management strategies to be able to moderate the effect their own emotions have on their behavior and wellbeing. As children learn to handle their emotions better, they will grow into being happy, healthy adults who can take on the challenges of life in a positive spirit.