

Developing Community Outreach Programme for Government Schools in Delhi, India

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Abstract: The present research work focuses around the know-how and attitudinal perceptions of people in the society towards areas such as disaster management, gender sensitization and library management, especially in the fast-growing world of computers and mobiles. The research methodology selected Government school students since it is believed that students in the Government schools in India are underprivileged and are often not able to perceive education in the right manner. The research also wanted to begin with young minds, to read them, understand them and possibly mould them in a beneficial manner.

Keywords: awareness, disaster, gender, sensitization. books.

The present research was started in early October 2015 and had its soul embedded in outreach, that is, the extent of reaching out to those who are always at the receiving end, those sections of the community who live a life of misery, poverty and bear-minimum subsistence level. These were the young minds in Government schools, majority of whom could enter an educational institution only due to some government initiative, and who returned to their cruel destiny and circumstances after the school wended for the day (cf. Kaur and Kapil, 2008). An attempt has been made to fill the gap between the underprivileged and the privileged sections by addressing issues that are of immediate ecological and societal concerns. The objective of the research was to raise awareness among the Government school students and to identify best methods of reaching out to them. Tools and methodologies such as lectures, workshops, documentaries and open discussions were used. Students from classes 9th to 12th were selected for this study.

Students from this age bracket were chosen since they are not merely at the receiving end but also retaliate and even criticize through their talks and discussions. The research collected the views and suggestions of these students while also developing a methodology of engaging this section of the society in a meaningful manner. The selected students lived with meagre resources, faced apathy and were trained and tamed to believe that their existence is part of their destiny. It was therefore important to intervene in their growth and development. It was felt that exposing such students to the realms of disaster management, library management and gender sensitization will aid in broadening their horizons and allow them to have a holistic view on their own education.

The first focus of the research for engaging students was disaster management. Overtime, disasters have become frequent happening in the world and so in this ever changing world it becomes necessary for a person to be aware of her surroundings and types of possible disasters. Overtime these disasters have changed in form, intensity and their frequency. But the society still lacks adequate information and awareness regarding these disasters. Earlier natural disaster like earthquake, floods etc. used to dominate in the disaster realm, but nowadays with advancement and development, man-made disaster like pollution, fires, oil spills etc. have also increased. Thus, it is important that every locality should have proper knowledge and should be aware about the disasters and should know how to safeguard themselves. It was felt that conducting interactive workshops was the best method for engaging students. It did prove to be fruitful and students could be oriented about disasters and also the causes and ways to deal with them. The workshop remained focused on earthquake disaster, to which Delhi is highly prone.

The second focus of the project was library. Books are rivers of knowledge and teach us to be more pragmatic in our lives. Library is a place from where we can access

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books easily. Therefore, it becomes necessary to have enough information about having and accessing libraries around us. It was felt that to create the interest of the students, they could be informed about classification and cataloguing of books instead of just making them read books right away. Students were also made aware on how books are created and the history of publication. Students did find this manner of engaging them with the library interesting and exhibited curiosity to learn more about the library system. Hands-on training was also provided and students were made to arrange books in the library and were also encouraged to do so in their homes.

The third focus of the research was to understand gender perception in students and find ways to meaningfully engage them on this topic. With time, our society and its culture are also changing. Nature has provided equality to both genders but with time one began to be preferred over another which resulted in gender inequality. Therefore, attempts were made to identify methods for creating gender sensitization in students. It was felt that this could be best carried out by engaging students on real time issue such as female foeticide, domestic violence and acid attacks. Cybercrime against women was another issue that was selected for such discussions. This indirect way of engaging the students on gender issues did prove useful. Students were also provided with information about cyber laws and were provided with helpline numbers. This was necessary to make the students better equipped and well informed about the situations and challenges being faced by our society today.

The face to face interaction with students from the Government school brought forward some interesting insights. Many of these students were already aware about disasters, especially since many of them had faced at least one disaster (natural or man-made) in their recent past. The selected students were provided training in order to equip them with the knowledge to cope with these disasters and thus become leaders and trainers in their own rights and privileges. Perception of these students on gender issues was also noted. The opinion of the majority of the students was such that they held women responsible for the perverted mindset of the society. Patriarchy was prominently noted in these young minds. The idea of a library was known to these students but majority of them had never been to one. In most cases, students found it difficult to understand what actually existed in the name of a Library.

During a lifetime, a human being constantly interacts with her environment and becomes a part of it in this process. This relationship between human and nature has been going on for ages and will continue in the future as well. This age of industrialization has made mankind accustomed to a range of amenities which have created a distance between man and nature and between man and man. This is diminishing the interaction between the two. Through this community outreach programme, we attempted to have some hands-on experience and do some brain-storming sessions with the students, at a level where it matters the most.

Awareness about disasters, gender sensitivity and the importance of learning and knowledge through books thus became three vehicles for engaging with the students and for teaching and learning with them. What was also perceived during the research was that the students from Government schools live in harsh environments and face mental and physical violence which pressurizes them to develop compulsive attitudes. They also feel remorse for not having the resources to be able to chase their dreams. The system brackets them. It was therefore felt that these students were facing several micro-disaster on a daily basis. The moment resources are minimal, opportunities to explore the world is minimized. There is thus a need to ensure these students are provided at least the bare minimum that they need for taking them out of the poverty cycle.

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