

**Workshop I**  
**Certificate Programme in Foundations of**  
**Education**  
**(January 3 -14, 2008)**

**Brief Report**

DIGANTAR has, in the recent past, embarked on the path of conducting a *Certificate Programme in the Foundations of Education*. The programme consists of a *series of four workshops*, each workshop spread over a period of 12 working days, and covering three courses. The *first workshop* of the programme *in the third of the series* was conducted from January 3, 2008 to January 14, 2008 at the *Digantar* campus in Jaipur. The workshop covered three courses – Philosophical Perspective on Education, Sociological Perspective on Education, and the Perspectives on Learning. 26 participants covering the states of Karnataka, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan (from the Azim Premji Foundation, Indian School of Education, Ahmedabad, and Digantar, Jaipur) attended the workshop.

The main purpose and thrust of these workshops is to arrive at an overarching understanding of the broad conceptual framework of what 'education' is, and gradually come to a comprehension of the processes that may be involved in being able to operationalise the aims of education in schools – in other words, an understanding of what would constitute the *foundations* of education. This understanding is aimed to be reached through *a process that involves reading, exchange of ideas, discussion and examination of issues in a holistic manner, reflecting on*

*them individually and in the course of group-work: an exercise that leads to clarity - of concepts and potential practices.*

## **Mode of Conduct**

The workshop was conducted in an **interactive mode** with the day divided into

**three sessions of around an hour and a half each** in addition to a morning Feedback Session.



There was a constant attempt to involve the participants in the deliberations even as the Resource Persons held forth on the various topics being covered. Quite a substantial part of the sessions, especially in the first half of the entire workshop, went into group discussions by the participants who, after the group work, came up with their presentations in open sessions in which issues were discussed, doubts clarified and alternative views expressed.

## **The Philosophical Perspective on Education**

This perspective aimed at an understanding of the overarching goals of education in the wider context of the *visualization of a human being, a learning child, the sort of society that one would like to be a part of, and the idea of a good school*. A series of readings, some as a part of group

work, others on an individual basis, were the cornerstones for the gradual emergence of this aimed-at understanding.

**I. Three texts centring round the idea of a school :** ‘Tolstoy as a Schoolmaster’, ‘An Attempt to Make a Change’ (from Gijubhai Badheka’s book *Divaswapna*), and an excerpt from Charles Dickens’ novel *Hard Times* - were the first in this series of extended readings.

### **Group work**

These texts, each evoking a vivid picture of the idea of a school in its own distinct fashion, were worked upon in groups by the participants. Three groups, each working on one of the texts, read and discussed them, subsequently making presentations on the basis of the views that emerged from the group work. Open discussion on the presentations brought to the fore issues relevant to the context of the readings. In the process, broader principles of issues in school-education too came into focus – principles revolving round the issues of the role of a teacher, the autonomy of the child within the classroom, what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’, what is critical thinking, how one may define ‘creativity’, the impact of cultural mores and practices on processes of education etc.

### **II. Reading Michael Oakeshott :**

A reading and understanding of a piece (excerpt from “Education: the engagement and its frustrations”) by Michael Oakeshott - ***The Idea of School*** – first individually, and then collectively, brought into focus Oakeshott’s visualization of a school in terms of a child’s initiation into it, the role of what he calls ‘inheritance’ in this initiation and in the period subsequent to that, the



values that the child is likely to acquire through this initiation, and the school as a community of teachers and learners. A **conceptual map of the piece was also constructed** in the process of this reading and comprehension of the piece.

**III. Charting the AIMS of Education:** An article by Rohit Dhankar, *From Classroom to Aims: Mapping the Field of Curriculum* became the springboard for **the visualization of a school-going child as the focus of the aims of education**. An extended discussion on the capabilities of a child at the age of 5+ and at 17+ led up to what this would mean in terms of establishing the Foundations of Curriculum, deciding the Curriculum Core, and determining the Curriculum Details.

**IV. Group work – The School of our Desire:** Having read and worked on three descriptions of school in practice (as in the first three readings), discussed the idea of school as enunciated by Oakeshott, and given thought to the aims of education with the child as the focus of attention, the next step was to **visualize a school one would desire to have**. This was discussed in groups, and presentations were made on the basis of the discussions within groups.

**V. Group Work - The Idea of a Human Being:** As some sort of an extension of this process, another exercise was taken up – an effort was made to form an *idea of a human being* – understanding human nature was the theme, and again there were group discussions (and presentations thereof) centring round the idea of a human being *as distinct from other beings*. The underlying purpose of the exercise was to *link the idea of a human being to the idea of a desirable society and thereafter to the idea of the school as envisaged by the participants*. The nature of society we would like to have, and the quality of a human

being in that society would give a direction to the idea of the school desired for.

Another piece (another excerpt from “Education: the engagement and its frustrations”) by Michael Oakeshott, **To Be Human**, was brought under discussion. Also brought into focus was the broad philosophical outlook of the eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant: the epistemology (what can we know?), the ethical outlook (what ought we to do?), and the parameters of human action expounded by him were brought within the sphere of comprehension. Getting to know and understand Kant was a part of the process of developing an understanding of the nature of the human species, linked up with **the idea of knowledge**, and of social morals within the ambit of universal action.

Exploring the idea of **what learning is**, what the *process* of learning involves, was also a part of the Philosophical Perspective and this issue too was discussed in quite a bit of detail. (Which session is being referred to? I was doing this as the left over work of perspectives on learning.)

**VI.** The Philosophical Perspective on Education also involved a wide-ranging discussion on the **Preamble of the Constitution of India**: the concepts of *democracy, secularism, justice, liberty, equality, equity, fraternity* were brought into focus and an attempt was made to define them in the Indian context, linking them up with the larger idea of a society. This was followed by a reading of and discussion on the **Aims of Education as defined in the National Curriculum Framework 2005**.

## **The Sociological Perspective on Education**

The sessions on this perspective (and later, the Perspective on Learning) ran in conjunction with the Philosophical Perspective.

**I. Group Work – What society is and what is asocial:** After a preliminary overview of the discipline of sociology and its modes of enquiry, work on this perspective began with group-work that involved



the **visualization of what society is and what it is not**. The participants were supposed to visualize three images /representations of society, simultaneously giving the basis of why they are considered to be associated with the idea of society. They were also expected to give one representation of something that would be considered to be **asocial**. This would lead up to the visualization of a workable notion of society, in the process bringing forth the **elements that go into the making of society**. Three groups worked on this and came out with their conclusions.

**II. Group Work - Schools of sociological thought and practice vis-à-vis education :** This involved the exercise of coming to understand the various schools of sociological thought and practice in relation to education through readings and group presentations covering the *Functionalist* and the *Liberal Perspectives on Education* (Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons and others), the *Critical and Radical Standpoints on Education* ( Louis Althusser; Samuel Bowles and Herbert

Gintis ; Ivan Illich's) and the *Inter-actionist Perspective on Education* (Labov, Nell Keddie, Aron V. Cicourel & John I. Kitsuse and others)

These sessions on the sociological perspectives on education gave an insight as to how, in what diverse ways, school-education has been viewed from the sociological standpoint, especially in the West. Through the processes of working in groups, discussing, arguing and exchanging views on these sociological streams of thought, the participants came to a clarity of understanding on classroom practices and educational processes, their relation to the socio-cultural and politico-economic values prevalent in society, and the overall impact of these on the way in which school-going children are viewed.

**III. Group Work:** As an extension of the above there was also a group-based presentation of **aspects of the New Sociology of Childhood**, contrasting the ways in which children were viewed earlier (passive, homogenous individuals) and how they have been viewed by a new school of sociologists in whose scheme of things social and relational factors also count and the child is viewed in terms of plurality of childhoods.

**IV. General Discussion on 'Sociologising Merit' :** An article by Amman Madan, *Sociologising Merit*, was also discussed, bringing into focus the issue of merit – its historical trajectory, its relevance in the present socio-cultural situation, its relation to the ideas of meritocracy and social inequality.

The Sociological Perspective on Education aimed at bringing into focus the idea of society, the child as viewed in the sociological context of education, education and school in the context of and in relation to society.

## The Perspective on Learning

This was the third component in the scheme of the workshop. It brought the child and aspects of a child's psychology into the centre of the deliberations. The



processes of thinking and reasoning, stages in the development of a learning child, and the way in which a child negotiates the process of learning were viewed and discussed in the context of various approaches to learning – the Behaviorist and Humanistic Approach, and the Cognitive Approach encompassing the personality-theories of Piaget and Vygotsky.

**I. The Behaviorist Approach:** with its stimulus-response-reinforcement paradigm as the basis of learning was the first step in the exercise of trying to understand and unravel the various psychology-based perspectives on learning. The paradigm of language acquisition through associative processes of learning, and Skinner's concept of learning based on reinforcement and environmental stimuli was enunciated; also brought up was the counter-view forcefully propagated by Noam Chomsky that language seems to be learned without, in a sense, being taught (needs to be rearticulated. Chomsky's point alluded to here was that there much in language acquisition that can not be explained though stimulus -response conditioning.) – something for which, according to Chomsky, behaviorism does not seem to have an explanation.

**II. Presentation on Piaget:** As opposed to the behaviorist approach that postulated change in behaviour under the influence of the



environmental stimuli to be the basis of learning, **Jean Piaget** brought **cognition** at the centre of learning. A **presentation** was made by one of the participants on Piaget and *his* work on the theory of a child's intellectual development in stages, characterized by him as the sensori-motor stage, the pre-operational stage, the concrete operational stage and the formal operational stage. The experiments conducted by Piaget involving children and the key concepts propounded by him were brought into discussion- especially the framework of assimilation-accommodation-adaptation-equilibrium that, according to Piaget, is one of the schemas that a child develops in the course of his development. The criticism of Piaget's theory was also put forth while at the same time bringing out its **relevance and application in the field of education and in the classroom** – Piaget's theory propels one to think of children to be active learners; it gives the basis for looking upon the classroom as an active space; it also helps understand the importance of utilizing the child's current levels of understanding for his further development, and helps push the child into thinking differently through the creation of "cognitive conflict" based on questioning.

**III. Presentation on Vygotsky:** Another presentation was made by a participant on the theories propounded by the Russian Lev Semionovich **Vygotsky** who, in contrast with Piaget's theories, stressed the *role of culture and social interaction in a child's development*. Vygotsky's concepts such as the *Zone of Proximal Development* (related to the level of a child's ability to learn something) and *scaffolding* were enunciated and discussed at length as also the significance of Vygotsky's conceptual framework for a teacher – taking the child as an active learner, the concept of peer learning and of teacher as a mediator rather than an instructor, looking to the child's potential, and not the performance per se etc. The question of the relation between cognition and language – which of the two has precedence over the other – also came up for an interesting discussion in terms of Vygotsky's views on the issue. It was also pointed out that in Vygotsky's scheme of things

there was a space for elementary mental functions and higher mental functions in a child's process of acquiring knowledge.

## **Other Highlights**

### **Visit to Schools**

During the course of the workshop all the participants, in four separate groups, also **visited four Digantar schools** being run within the surrounding area of around 20 kilometres. A session of sharing the experiences of this visit opened up many areas for discussion in the context of the processes of school education. The alternative system of the teaching-learning process being followed in these schools gave new insights to the participants, especially in the context of the teacher-student relations and the methods of teaching being adopted in these schools. Some of the issues that came up for discussion were - the concept of peer-learning, autonomy of the child within the classroom, different levels of learning within the same class and the way in which this problem was being negotiated by the teachers, the possible efficacy of such methods if adopted in government schools, the question of uniform in schools etc. It was also a matter of curiosity, wonder and appreciation as to how much of hard labour and commitment must be going into the work being done by the teachers in the *Digantar* schools, how they must be keeping up their levels of motivation; also, whether or not the children of these schools were later able to adjust themselves when they were shifted to the mainstream schools.

### **Feedback Sessions**

During the 12-day workshop, the first session **every day** was a feedback session. This was the time for free and frank expression and exchange of ideas, reservations (if any) and suggestions, giving the participants the freedom to air their views on the proceeding of the earlier day or on any other issues related to education. This, indeed, was a mutually useful exercise, giving the organizers the feedback required for plugging loopholes and limitations, if any, and giving the

participants an opportunity to air their views on the conduct of the workshop.

This feedback session also emerged as the slot in which **collective songs**, especially Children's Songs, were sung.

### **Logical Puzzles**

An interesting "titbit" was the logical puzzles that were thrown in for the participants to solve overnight, or during the sessions on some of the days

The workshops – indeed the certificate programme in its entirety – are being conducted under the guidance and direction of **Mr. Rohit Dhankar** who was also the Resource Person for the Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives on education in this workshop. The Resource Persons for the Sociological Perspective and the Perspective on Learning were Mr. **Manoj Kumar** from *Digantar* and **Ms. Indu** from the *Azim Premji Foundation* respectively.

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