

Nurturing a Better Future for Best Schooling Practices: A Review Portraying the Alternative Schooling, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

Rajvi Trivedi, Pramod Kumar MPM*

School of Education, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), India

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Abstract Schooling is an essential stage in the socialization of a child. Schooling has a direct effect on a child's educational achievement, acquisition of skills, social cognition, and feelings (Sylva, 1994). Every schooling practice has the potential to mould the child and shape future citizens. Today many different schooling practices are prevailing in India. However, the majority of these schooling practices focus more on the cognitive development of the child and nurtures the values of competition and insecurity among the children. The schools have turned into factories that bring out mechanical individuals who cannot question, express, and voice themselves but who can only become a part of the race of obtaining marks and jobs. This kind of schooling may help in increasing the literacy rates but has not helped in producing truly educated and ethical citizens. It has led to moral degradation in society (Parihar, Parihar & Sharma, 2018). In this context, it is imperative to analyse the alternative schooling practices that nurture a better future. One such school that educates the heart, allows the flowering of the child and nurtures good citizens is the Valley School, Bangalore. Through this article, an attempt has been made to present a description of prevailing schooling practices and the challenges faced in the educational context. The authors put forth a review of schooling practices at valley school, one of the best alternative schools and ignite the discussion on Valley school being the best in nurturing a better future.

Keywords Valley School, Flowering, Conditioning, Delinquency, Initiative, Whole-Child Education, Inner Transformation, Self-Discovery

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

From an individual's birth to death, one is socialized by various institutions like family, kinship, school, Media, and others. One of the most important influencing agencies is the school and educational institutions. Schooling has paramount power to mould and develop the personality of Individuals. Research has shown that different levels of schooling, including pre-primary and primary, have an impact on aspects like cognition of the child, scholastic achievement, and social behaviour like delinquency and employment (Sylva, 1994). Schooling assumes the responsibility of nurturing children, developing them into productive and ethical citizens of the country.

Schooling practices have been quite dynamic in Nature and have adapted to the changing needs of the society time and again. From the Gurukul System in the past to the International Baccalaureate in the present, Schooling practices have continuously changed and evolved. Currently existing schooling practices are diverse in Nature. For the purpose of this study, the widespread and general schooling practices observed in state Boards, CBSE, ICSE, and other schools have been considered. The prevailing schooling practices put emphasis on education for all, co-education, content knowledge, best academic outputs, student-centered learning, continuous assessment strategy, technology, the infrastructure of the schools and some practices have gradually started to look at the aspects of service-learning and sustainable development.

Today, School buildings are equipped with the latest facilities and technology in order to provide quality education. With the increasing flow of information and extensive use of all kinds of media and technology, schools and teachers are focusing good amount of funds and energy on the integration of technology in the curriculum for better learning outcomes (Jansen and Merwe, 2015). Computer-Assisted Instruction and Learner-Controlled Instruction constitute emerging trends in Schooling practices (Kumar, 2017). A lot of emphasis is laid on Virtual classrooms, digital textbooks, mobile learning, STEM, artificial Intelligence, E-portfolios and similar aspects. Technology is believed to give better academic outputs and hence the integration of the same has been stressed upon. The new infrastructure and technology has changed the educational environment at present and whether this kind of environment or an environment emphasizing close contact with Nature can be considered as a matter of debate and discussion.

For majority of the schools, content mastery and academic scores constitute the central characteristic of good results and growth. Today parents, teachers, policymakers, markets and schools have paid a lot of attention to academic achievement. Though schools might have some secondary objectives, the primary emphasis is always on Academic achievement and performance of students. Almost everybody engaged in this field focus only on academic achievement (Dev, 2016). The school that produces 100% results in 10th and 12th grade in India is considered as the best in terms of giving outcomes. This shows that students are driven to be a part of the stressful and competitive atmosphere of academic achievement. It is, without a doubt, a matter of question and research that how far is this stress on academic achievement and race of marks desirable for the holistic growth of students.

Apart from having policies for learning different languages, present Schooling practices are focusing on just one language that is English rather than having a multilingual outlook. English has become the measure of Intelligence in the present schooling practices. Even parents do not prefer education in vernacular or other national languages (Nadar, 2018). Apart from content, all other activities like assemblies are also conducted only in English. India is a diverse country and heterogeneity must be considered by all the schooling practices. It is indeed important that schools emphasize multilingual and multicultural education.

Today schooling has turned into an agency similar to that of a factory. It has driven people to essentially focus on getting marks and earning the highest amount of money. It has created a kind of rat race where people only focus on competition and getting the best results. This kind of schooling does not emphasize whole child education; rather, it is only concerned with the cognitive development of the child. Today parents, teachers, and schools are concerned only with materialistic education wherein the

focus is on the achievements of the child, and the overall development of the child is neglected (Ghosh, 2019). Teaching the brain has gained such a momentum that there is a complete neglect of teaching the heart. This kind of schooling results in moral degradation and does not help in producing ethical citizens.

The present schooling practices are driving the citizens to be more individualistic, competitive and marks-oriented and also to be engaged in immoral and unlawful activities. The system has failed to bring out ethical and truly educated citizens (Parihar, Parihar & Sharma, 2018). It is important to ask if such a system of schooling has any room for nurturing the children and youth and build a better society. This kind of schooling can only produce mechanical members of society who cannot break free of patterns. However, today nurturing the child into a better person and emphasizing overall development should be the aims of schooling. Research says that non-cognitive skills like creativity and critical thinking matter for a child's future, and they can also be nurtured in schools, and hence these skills should be the broader goal of education (Garcia & Weiss, 2016).

The present context of education in the country calls for alternative schooling practices that aim at whole-child education, creating good citizens and nurturing the future. Across the globe, in various countries, one finds a vast variety of alternative forms of education, driven by philosophies from local as well as international philosophers (Swetambari & Kumar, 2018). There are many alternative schools in the city which employ quite unique schooling practices. One of the educational philosophies and best alternative schooling practices that provide whole-child education and nurture children into being good citizens is Valley School, Bangalore, built upon the philosophy of J Krishnamurti. The philosophy proposed by J Krishnamurti about building a good society through education sounds relevant today. This study has selected the Valley school as a representation of alternative schooling practices.

The literature shows that there have been many individual studies on the philosophy and schooling practices employed at the Valley school. These studies are limited to description and analysis of the philosophy in terms of its advantages and disadvantages. There are a few studies that discuss the Practices of Valley school in the context of the prevailing schooling practices. Not many studies look at how this philosophy can provide solutions to the evils of the current schooling practices. This article presents the review of practices at an alternative School in the context of challenges faced by the present schooling practices. The alternative school selected is the Valley school, Bangalore as it is one of the topmost in the city. The researchers put forth a discussion on the possibility of implementing Schooling practices of Valley school in the general educational context and emphasize the question of whether Valley school is the best in terms of nurturing a

better future for schooling practices.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

- To put forth the prevailing schooling practices
- To highlight peculiar issues of whole-child education in the present schooling practices
- To present a review of practices employed at the valley (Alternative) school
- To emphasize the philosophy of J Krishnamurti in the present educational context
- To discuss the possibility of implementing the practices of Valley school in the general educational context

2. Methodology

The researchers have selected literature review as the method for this study in order to present an overview of existing studies on the research area. The literature review will help in identifying the available studies and recent discussions about the research area. Any other approach like an interview would not have helped in gaining a strong foundation in the philosophy as it is possible through conducting a review of studies. Before the researcher actually steps on the field to observe schooling practices, it is imperative to build a strong bias-free background on the existing perspectives on schooling practices. It is necessary for the researcher to have a strong base in the theories before conducting observation and interviews on the field about which practice works the best. According to the researchers, this field needs a little more review and discussion by scholars. This paper will act as an ignition for scholars to think about the research area and to think about ideal schooling practices. In order to ignite scholarly discussions, literature review articles are the best means.

The databases used for the initial search of the articles include Jstor, ERIC, Google scholar, publications and articles by OECD, UNESCO, and other online platforms. Printed material, including a book written by J Krishnamurti, has also been used for the review. The time frame for the review has been from 2015 to 2019. However, some of the studies have been an exception as papers about schooling and books on the philosophy of J Krishnamurti have been written in the past and the most recent papers the researchers could get access were that of the years 2000 and 2001. However, for current schooling practices and issues of schooling the recent research papers have been selected. The Language of the review papers has been only English. The keywords used for search review papers were the following: Valley School, J Krishnamurti, Relevance of J Krishnamurti's philosophy, Issues in the current Schooling practices, emerging trends in the schooling practices. After doing the initial search, the relevant papers in the field that fell in the recent time frame were selected

for the study. J Krishnamurti and his philosophies have been researched not only in the educational context but in many other contexts, including spirituality and other aspects. In the initial search, all studies pertaining to the education field were considered and then the researchers narrowed down the scope by focusing on best schooling practices. Hence the articles which were more contextual to the purpose of the study were selected for the review.

The review is meant for a wide range of audiences. The audience that the study targets include Educationists, policymakers and research scholars in the field, curriculum developers, educational leaders, teachers, teacher educators and other readers interested in the field of schooling practices and educational philosophies,

3. Review of Practices at Valley School

J Krishnamurti was a philosopher and revolutionary teacher who contributed valuable insights to Indian education and worked to awaken people, their Intelligence, and their sense of responsibility. His idea of education was not concerned with writing an examination, excelling in studies and getting a top-rated job, but emphasized the cultivation and flowering of children. Education, for him, was concerned with self-discovery and inner renewal.

Krishnamurti's schools did not exist as organizations that focus on indoctrination of students; they were actually places that enabled the flowering of teachers and students and where the future citizens can be prepared because schools are meant for that. The idea of 'flowering' here implies an unfolding of the consciousness of individuals in relationship to one another in educational praxis. The psychological development of individuals is seen as being equivalent to acquiring academic knowledge and skills (Malhotra, 2015).

The Valley school has evolved based on the educational philosophy given by J Krishnamurti. Education in these schools is concerned with breaking free of patterns rather than being a mechanical member of society. Individual transformation is necessary for social change. Any social movement cannot bring a change until a person transforms from within. The school follows unconventional patterns of schooling and focuses on the inner transformation and liberation of human beings (Malhotra, 2015).

Valley school emphasizes the nurturing and cultivation of the child in a holistic manner. It focuses on a child's social, emotional, psychological and spiritual development along with academics. The curriculum of the school is such that children are equipped with various skills for real life and all their different abilities are catered to. The students have to practice all co-curricular activities compulsory from grade I to VIII. The school has teachers who encourage and help children to take up various arts and crafts including painting, wood work, sculpting, thread

work, stitching, weaving, macramé, paper crafts, performing arts (theatre, percussion instruments, vocal music and dance), pottery, and ceramics. Students are also open to bring in their preferred art forms for inclusion into the curriculum (Swetambari & Kumar, 2018). In this manner, the school assumes the responsibility of developing the non-cognitive and social-emotional skills of the children. Internationally recognized organizations like UNESCO say that "quality education includes the development of those skills, values, and attitudes that enable citizens to live healthy and fulfilled lives; make informed decisions and respond to local and global decisions" (Garcia & Weiss, 2016). Hence the education given at valley school becomes all the more relevant today.

According to this philosophy, competing with others, getting the highest score and being the best in academics is not the driving force for students. In the school, students do not have to appear for exams till grade 8th and exams are another normal event of life for which students are not pressurized at all. No sense of fear and competition has been inculcated among the children. Krishnamurti puts forth the argument that it is the most important aim of education to free people from fear and insecurity.

Every teacher and school should aim to help children from the beginning to be completely free of fear so that when you go out into the world, you are an intelligent human being, full of real initiative. The initiative is destroyed when you are merely copying others and bound by tradition and authority. (Krishnamurti, 2000, Chapter 1, p.25)

Developing a sense of security is very important. Ambitions and insecurities shall not haunt these students. Various practices in Valley school portray this philosophy. There is no selection of best students, even for events like annual days in the school. All students perform together and participate equally. There is no emphasis on getting the highest score or being a ranker in the class. The students participate in sports without having the spirit of winning. This approach to education nurtures the individual, enables the development of a free mind without any fear and gives space for creativity and divergent thinking.

In this school, there is more emphasis on the process of learning rather than the end product. It is believed that if only the end goal is focused upon, we miss the process and journey. It is a journey meant for both teachers and students to learn and unlearn. Through dialogues, teachers and students try and understand their assumptions. They become more aware of their conditioning and ways of thinking. Learning here is not just gaining information, but the act of relating is given importance. Learning is more experiential, based on Krishnamurti's philosophy. The school calls itself progressive as it involves experimenting, experience, and reflection in its process of learning. It

Valley school also exposes and sensitizes students to diversity and multiculturalism. Their assembly consists of all students singing songs and Bhajans from various

languages. The assemblies include students and teachers sitting down on well-laid mats, and singing hymns of peace. The session begins with a soulful chanting of the Om, followed by songs in Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali and other regional languages (Swetambari & Kumar, 2018). They practice all types of folk dances in their art classes. The school follows all principles of what is called the global education. This ensures that students are sensitive and respectful of all cultures; and that students are prepared for harmonious living in their future.

The philosophy in valley school is based on freedom. Children are not bound by rules and regulations, traditions, or authority. Students do not have uniforms and disciplinary measures like punishments or CCTV cameras monitoring them. For Krishnamurti, strict discipline cannot create an intelligent human being. "Discipline means to learn not to conform." (Malhotra, 2015) The school has lined up certain practices wherein all students together discuss the consequences of doing something undesirable, like being late to the meals. Hence, they participate in decision making and also understand that the freedom they have is their responsibility.

Krishnamurti believes that only when one is free to think, discover and find out one can be intelligent, only then the mind becomes very active and clear. Intelligence demands that one should break away from tradition and live by one's own. One should be free when one is young; otherwise, one can never be a free and happy individual (Krishnamurti, 2000, Chapter 1, p.42).

The teacher-student relationship is also different from regular schools. The teacher is not an authority but a facilitator. The philosophy says that teachers also should be well aware of the conditioning and should learn and grow along with the students. The teacher is given autonomy and hence the teacher finds out his/her techniques of teaching and evolves in the school. A teacher is not the source of all information. The teacher should be well aware of whether he/she is going to reproduce a mechanical member of the society or a creative human being.

At Valley schools, the students are in constant contact with Nature. All their classes take place in outdoor learning spaces wherein classes can happen by the lakes, ponds or in the art village. The atmosphere around them is such that they feel freer, healthier and more secure.

Outdoor learning usually called as learning which happens beyond the walls of the indoors" (Zink & Burrows, 2008; Harris, 2017), is believed to provide more memorable and stimulating learning experiences (Dillon et al., 2006; Nundy, 2001; Peacock, 2006; Harris, 2017) and instill "excitement, interest, and motivation to learn" (Bell et al., 2009, p. 4; Harris, 2017).

They are sensitive to every living creature, they are curious about Nature and they also love Nature. They would never think of killing an insect or plucking a flower. Since they are in constant touch with Nature, they conserve,

protect and love Nature. Activities like gardening and land care enhance their sense of responsibility towards Nature.

Apart from having classes in different learning spaces, they do not have a classroom of their own. There are no sections like 6th A and 6th B and classes assigned to a particular group of students as done in the regular schools. Hence the students do not develop any kind of possessiveness for a class or for any piece of land for that matter. In their land care sessions, they plant the trees but in such a way that none of the trees belongs to any of the class or students. Different grade levels will be responsible for one tree. Hence the idea of possessing something and getting attached is not instilled among the students.

The school has taken some exemplary steps in gender sensitivity and equality among all the students and staff (Swetambari & Kumar, 2018). The school also has a very inclusive atmosphere wherein equality is embedded at all levels in the school. Girls and boys play volleyball together, they play musical instruments like Tabla together and there are no different teams for boys and girls. Everybody has to wash the plates and keep them clean, however rich or poor, boy or girl. This idea of equality is not a result of any explicit effort like additional schemes and initiatives of the government but is ingrained in the school philosophy in such a way that the atmosphere appears to be naturally equal. Even the teachers are free from any bias. This is what shapes and moulds the mindset of children from the very beginning in terms of inclusion and equality. Such a philosophy can nurture truly educated citizens and a good society.

The entire educational atmosphere at Valley school is very engaging and peaceful. It is a space that ensures the physical as well as mental well-being of teachers and students. This kind of space gives maximum room for the right education and producing good citizens and proves to be one of the best practices of schooling.

4. Discussion

The review presented above shows that the practices employed at valley school do provide an answer to the challenges that the present schooling practices are facing. The philosophy stands contrary to the competitive spirit that has been encouraged in the general schooling practices by teachers, parents and schools and provides a solution to the stress laid on students for scoring the highest and focus only on academics. Holistic development of students in certain as the curriculum gives equal weightage to all the subjects, including all kinds of art forms and sports. It is more student-centric in Nature compared to any other regular schooling practices.

Compared to the other schooling practices which might have one or two days or events of the year dedicated to multilingual and multicultural education, Valley School has it as a crucial part of its curriculum which is practiced

as an everyday routine. The arts and crafts practiced at the Valley school are also given more significance in contrast to other schooling practices. The Valley school focuses more on holistic development and developing the non-academic skills of the students.

Students are nurtured in such an atmosphere where they are in close contact with Nature. They are neither bound by technology nor by four walls of the classroom. This makes Valley school different from other schools where children are taught by smart class and other facilities. The need of the hour is to take children closer to the Nature, which is not visible in the general schooling practices. Valley School gives complete freedom to the child to grow and flower.

This puts forth the idea that in comparison to general Schooling practices, alternative schooling practices like Valley school get significant weightage on its philosophies and practices. It stands out amongst others and provides many solutions to the challenges faced by the present schooling practices.

However, it has to be understood that not all students will go to alternative schools like Valley School and all schools won't even function like Valley School. Hence, it is important to discuss the possibility of implementing some of the important practices employed at the valley school in the general educational context in order to envision a better future for schooling practices. Certain activities are easier to adopt, for instance, conducting assemblies that promote multiculturalism can certainly be practiced in general schooling. Schools can also look at reducing the examination stress and the number of times students have to take different assessments and bring about a change in the format of assessment as well. Schools can also make an attempt to build infrastructures that take children closer to Nature rather than buying new and expensive technology. General Schooling practices should also understand how Valley school gives significance to art, craft, music, dance, and land care and they should prioritize these arts just as they do for sciences and mathematics.

It has to be acknowledged that though the practices at valley school have innumerable benefits for developing holistic and good future citizens, there are some criticisms of the same as well. It is important to ask some questions about practices employed at the Valley School. The teaching methods at the school are very innovative but they can be effectively employed as the number of students is less in school. It is difficult to practice the same methods when there are more than 40 students in a single classroom. Hence adopting these teaching methods become impractical for general schools as well. Apart from the same, the students at Valley school are nurtured in a stress-free atmosphere and they have enjoyed complete freedom. What are the scenarios when these students step out in the real world, which is full of competition and stress? It is imperative to ask how the students will be able to adjust to the harsh realities of life. The question of fitting

into a mainstream society always remains. Schools like these might charge fees that are not affordable by all and hence the chances that all get an opportunity to study in such a school are meager. It has to be noted that such schools are usually out of reach for lower and middle-class families. Hence these and other critics point to the fact that there is a need to engage in further research in order to decide schooling practices that can actually help in solving the challenges that exist in the present educational context. There is a need to ponder upon how can the practices of Valley school be taken on the actual field so that all students and the nation at large benefits.

5. Conclusions

In the present day, there is a need to promote progressive and experiential education as that provided by Valley school, as only that can help us build good citizens and a good society. These so-called 'normal schools' are only producing mechanical members in the society who operate based on traditions and who are not at all free. Today the schools are creating mere careerists and developing children only in cognitive and academic aspects, but what is needed is to shift the norm to whole child education. Unlike these, Valley school nurtures the children and the youth and gives way for self-discovery and individual inner transformation. "For Krishnamurti, therefore, the right kind of education does not simply produce engineers, doctors or scientists, but a 'human being, who is alive, fresh, eager'" (Malhotra, 2015). This article presented review of alternative schooling and how valley school stands out and provides solutions to the challenges faced by present schooling practices. The researchers put forth the discussion on the possibility of implementing the philosophy of valley school in the general educational context. It is extremely important to think about the question of what is kind of schooling practice required for improving the educational scenario and nurture good citizens? The researchers intend to direct the audience towards a discussion on how to improve the present schooling practices in the light of best practices employed at the Valley school.

6. Suggestions for Further Research

It is important to undertake research on analysing the relevance and outcomes of prevailing schooling practices in order to understand if they are effective or not in the present-day context. This research should also present the areas of improvement in the present schooling practices and systems. This article presented challenges that have resulted from the present schooling practices. Hence further research should aim at curriculum changes in the general schooling practices that can promote whole-child education. This is targeted specifically to curriculum

developers and policymakers in the field.

Research is needed to answer the question on the inclusion of Valley schools' practices in the general educational context. Educationists, curriculum developers and other Research Scholars in the field should answer the question through experimental and observational studies and make an attempt to implement the valley school's practices in other schools. Teachers can also make an attempt to adopt the teaching methods of valley school and observe the effects of the same. This can give the ground reality about the practical implementation of methods in regular classrooms and schools.

Numerous literatures exist on the history of traditional education in India and around the world, the gaps that exist in education, the need for alternative education, and some alternative education philosophies from around the world (Swetambari & Kumar, 2018). Hence there is a need to undertake further research on the benefits of alternative schooling practices and its potential to nurture a better future for schooling practices.

There is a constant churn in the academic community on what is the true equation that makes one education system successful over another. Educationists and researchers think upon the inquiry tending to tutoring rehearses that sustain a superior future-Does valley school depict the prescribed procedures that can help in building a superior society? A re-imagination of the whole framework is inescapable for a superior future.

This research area needs more scholarly discussions and reviews that can build a base in the schooling practices for the researchers on the field. Research in this area will have benefits for the entire educational system and will have implications for all the stakeholders, including teachers, parents, administrators and many others. Teachers will also have to engage in the process of unlearning. Parents will have to change their mindset and expectations about academic achievement and hence each and every person engaged in the educational field will have to adapt to changes in order to have a successful improvement in the existing schooling practices.

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