



ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY ON MITRANIKETAN

Education

S.S. Jayasenan

M.Sc (Psy), M.Ed, NET (Edn) Thiruvananthapuram.

ABSTRACT

Alternative education is often rooted in various philosophies that are fundamentally different from mainstream education, whose main objective is to produce compliant workforces for mainstream jobs. This study was intended to find out factors lead to origin, functioning, curricular and co curricular activities of the same along with socio educational activities of Mitraniketan. This study adopted a case study method to understand complete pedagogical process of this Institution. But to have a profound knowledge about it, the Investigator used participant observation, non-participant observation and Interview techniques. Study findings were organised under headings such as Origin and development, factors lead to origin, curricular and co curricular activities and socio educational aspects of Mitraniketan.

KEYWORDS

Alternative education, Mitraniketan, Education.

INTRODUCTION

Alternative schools are focused on developing the essence of being human (such as emotions, human/ moral/ critical thinking, communication skills, self-regulated learning), freedom and independence. This is why creative education is a vitally important part of the teaching in these schools. The teachers see art, philosophy, music, and writing as a way for children to express and understand themselves. This way of learning can be used (and is used) to develop the knowledge of traditional subjects like language, mathematics and science. This teaching ethos is based on children's central interests, so pupils are motivated to learn due to their interest in the subject, and teachers, in return, use their students' passion for these topics to develop other skills.

Smith, Bar and Barke (1965) reported that, at least one small school system labeled its only school as alternative. They have identified three indispensable criteria of alternative schools. (i) Students attended by choice. (ii) The school or programme be responsive to unmet local needs; and (iii) that student body reflects the racial and socio-economic mix of the community.

In this kind of school, families expect their children to be given an alternative to the traditional method of teaching and learning. But education is not something that just happens in schools, the family is also an important institution for children's learning which is why some parents decide to home school their children when they disagree with the educational methods and approaches in the current educational system.

Illustrious philosophers and pedagogues such as Montessori, Pestalozzi, Neill, and Rousseau have asserted that the child has an inner curiosity and passion for learning as well as an inner need to learn. Thus, the role of school is to provide them with resources to satisfy those needs and also keep their passion and curiosity undiminished. The learning process can be a creative journey where children build their own knowledge in accordance with their own needs.

Mitraniketan is an experimental non-profit social and educational project, founded by Padmashri Dr. K. Viswanathan near Vellanad, his native village, 30 km from Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala in south India. The project was begun with a view to offering education and training in a holistic spirit to primarily socially underprivileged children and youngsters. The organization focuses on alternative education mode for development. It is a 500-member community, including a staff of 100 men and women. It operates on a 60-acre campus in architecturally untraditional buildings with classrooms dotted around in a hilly green palm forest. There is a children's hostel, a students' college and hostel, a gym and sports field, a guest house, vocational training workshops, small art and grocery.

Methodology

This study was intended to find out factors lead to origin, functioning, curricular and co curricular activities of the same along with socio educational activities of Mitraniketan. This study adopted a case study method to understand complete pedagogical process of this Institution. Case study is a method of exploring and analyzing the life of a social

unit, be that of a person, a family, an institution, a cultural group or even an entire community.

RESULTS

- **Factors lead to origin and development of Mitraniketan**

The formation of Mitraniketan concentrated on a single person, Viswanathan Viswanathan was born on 1928 at Vellanad, a village in Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala State. The High School student Viswanathan, son of Krishna Panicker, was against such unjust traditions. He had the courage to openly question the unjust practices and record his protest with maturity in words beyond his age.

It was decided that programmes beneficial to the children of the locality had to be undertaken immediately. The reason was that a large number of children were dropouts after studying in one or two classes and were loitering and idling their time without doing anything. There was also another type of students who, though studying in school, did not have sufficient knowledge level as per their schooling. It was decided to start for all such students' informal (Non-formal) education, cultural and arts development programmes, skill development for employment, general knowledge, and above all holistic integrated programme based on a new education experiment, whatever be the sacrifices involved.

- **Organization and functioning of Mitraniketan**

Dr. K. Viswanathan started the innovative organization, Mitraniketan in 1956. Under his leadership, Mitraniketan grew up into a large multifaceted voluntary organization with various rural development activities. It has pioneered into people-centric, holistic rural development centre for improving the quality of life of the village communities. It strives to promote rural development with Gandhian principles. The guiding model for the activities of Mitraniketan is "community centred education in an education centred community"

Dr. Viswanathan has evolved an alternative system of education called "Development Education", oriented towards life and community development. He has changed the life of hundreds of people in the villages through Khadi and Village industries programmes. He is also a pioneer in transferring appropriate technologies in rural areas, in the field of water and sanitation, non conventional energy and sustainable agriculture.

- **Method of Teaching and Curriculum**

The method of teaching adopted in the nursery was based on 'learning while playing'. The curriculum of pre-school include Languages Malayalam and English, Simple arithmetic, Nursery rhymes, stories and plays.

- **Co-curricular activities**

The pre-school children have also been trained in creative arts, music and dance. All the children of the nursery were provided with free mid-day meal and transportation reasonable cost.

- **The Vikas Bhavan High School**

This is one of the core Development Education projects of Mitraniketan. It aims to empower children through an alternative

system of education which integrates need based practical knowledge with formal academic stream of learning. The school provides boarding and lodging, clothing and other day-to-day needs in addition to education to the total and tribal children who belong to different parts of Kerala.

- **Vocational Training**

In addition to academic training, the senior students have been trained in craft skills in the evening hours for creating interest and developing livelihood skills for employment. The craft skill include Tailoring and embroidery, Carpentry, Shoulder bag making, Electrical, Mushroom cultivation, Fruit processing, Book binding, Coir mat weaving, Doll making and Umbrella making. In addition, they are also being trained in Computer application and agriculture. Vocational training is given under the guidance of expert teachers.

- **Physical Education**

Physical Education is also given importance along with formal education for the overall development of students. Physical Education is practiced under the guidance of a well-qualified teacher.

- **Mitraniketan People's College**

Mitraniketan People's College was established in the year 1996 with the technical collaboration of Association of the Folk High Schools in Denmark (FFD) and with the financial support of Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA). People's College is an innovative development education project functioning based in the ideas of Danish Folk High Schools and Indian Gurukula system of education along with necessary inputs considering the local needs. It follows the concept of education for life rather than education for degrees and diplomas.

- **Mitraniketan Education Extension Centre**

Mitraniketan established an education Centre at Mananthavady in Wayanad District to cater to the educational and training needs of tribal youth. The centre mainly provides integrated education to tribal youth especially to tribal women covering both life and livelihood skill development. Vocational training programmes, women empowerment programmes, and Facilitators training programme are the main activities being conducted.

DISCUSSION

Everyone learns at a different pace and has own way of learning: self-regulated learning gives children the independence needed to learn following their individual way and timing. This means the individual child will need a deep self-awareness to help them understand themselves and to strengthen their own personal virtues. Educating children in self-consciousness can provide tools for learning in an independent way while improving their social skills. It is hoped that if we can understand ourselves we will be able to understand others more easily.

REFERENCES

1. Europa Press (2013, 11 Abril). España se sitúa a la cabeza de la UE en fracaso escolar con un 25% en 2012, según Eurostat [europapress.es] <http://www.europapress.es/sociedad/educacion/noticia-espana-situa-cabeza-uefracaso-escolar-25-2012-eurostat-20130411140128.html>
2. El Mundo (2013, 24 Abril). Los niños españoles, los últimos del mundo en reconocer el acoso escolar. De: <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2013/04/24/espana/1366811243.html>
3. García, E. (2014, 11 de Abril). España lidera el abandono escolar temprano con su mejor dato [elpais.com] http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2014/04/11/actualidad/1397211917_985641.html [4] Molero, A. (1987) El modelo de maestro en el pensamiento de la Institución Libre de Enseñanza. Revista interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado, 7-22.
4. Montessori, M. (1928) Ideas generales sobre el método: Manual Práctico. Madrid: CEPE S.L.
5. Montessori, M. (1986) La mente absorbente del niño. México: Editorial Diana.
6. Soñard, M. (1994). Johan Heinrich Pestalozzi. Perspectivas: Revista Trimestral de Educación Comparada, 24, 299-313.
7. Neill, A.S. (1994). Hijos en libertad. Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa.
8. Neill, A.S. (1963) Summerhill, Un punto de vista radical sobre la educación de los niños. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
9. Rosseau (2000) Emilio, o de la Educación. Madrid: Elaleph.com
10. Ferrer, A. (2010) Rosseau: música y lenguaje. España: PUV.
11. Zimmerman, B. J., & Schunk, D. H. (2001). Selfregulated learning and academic achievement: Theoretical perspectives. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
12. García, A (2013). Revisión y análisis de la metodología de incentiación y autorregulación en sistemas e-Learning en las Universidades Españolas (Trabajo de Fin de Grado). Universidad de Santiago de Compostela: Santiago de Compostela.