

Redefining intelligence

Isn't it time we devised a new yardstick for measuring potential?



BETWEEN US

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This week's sharing springs from two observations, which appear disconnected. One involves the work done by our gardener and the other involves a student at work. It gave rise to thoughts about how we conventionally perceive and define intelligence and the various ways these perceptions unfold, contributing to the process by which we create systems of education.

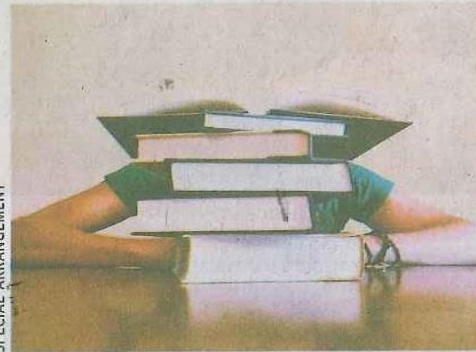
Last week, the city was inundated by heavy rainfall, causing our garden to flood. Spaces of ankle deep stagnant rain water gave rise to mosquito infestation. We asked our gardener if he could provide a solution and he explored various drainage methods. A few hours later, he was excited to show us his simple but effective solution. He created a difference in depth by adding more soil to one border and created small paths which drained the rainwater to a patch of plants. The next morning, the rain visited us again, and the system worked brilliantly!

The qualities that emerged were his curiosity, willingness to solve problems and an innate understanding of scientific principles. He had never been schooled and would not qualify as 'intelligent' in our system.

Student at work

In contrast, watching a student at work, one senses an increasing pressure to appear intelligent by committing facts to memory. Increasingly, we see students being made to copy pages of their textbooks as notes. Classroom teaching has become a race to complete portions. The student is unequivocally told not to answer in their own words. Whatever the subject is, the methodology seems to be the same – read, rote, regurgitate, repeat. Intelligence is then measured by the decimal point of test scores.

The domino effect of this can be seen at various levels. A recent newspaper account estimated that more than three quarter of students do not have any work-orientated skills, such as clarity in com-



Lost in the race: Pressure to conform.

munication and problem-solving. Having been programmed to think and respond in a certain way, their voices are not heard. This is not merely a lofty idea. The value of developing human potential and nurturing a holistic idea of intelligence is the momentum of evolution – at a personal, societal, national and a global level.

Change

Change comes from within and the onus is on all of us, as the stakeholders of the educational system, to re-evaluate the purpose of education. The ground reality of education as a racetrack has evolved due to a lack of awareness, operating from fear and believing in straitjacketed notions of success.

It is paradoxical that in a time where there are ample career choices, there is an opposing movement constricting potential and an increasing pressure to conform.

Despite daily struggles, the gardener has a sense of joy and simplicity. Many students have forgotten to smile, under the weight of backpacks and expectations, the workplace repeating this pattern at a larger scale.

In our race, we have forgotten to ask a simple question. Why do I do, what I do? The answer, while difficult to see, is worth asking, as change can only begin with an individual.

How many students could have worked out a solution like the gardener? It is a question that the system needs to ask itself.

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