

INTRODUCTION



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The Concept behind YUVA and the School Life Skills Programme (SLP).

"You must be the change you want to see in the world"

- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

"This above all, to thine own self be true

And it must follow as the night the day, thou cannot be false to any man"

- William Shakespeare

After more than three years of sustained, hard, *very hard* work, we sat down to check the extent to which our reforms had been successful, and we were justifiably proud of our achievements. We recorded a phenomenal increase of 36% in the Standard X CBSE Board exams from a low of 48% in 2005 to 84% in 2008. This was achieved with an *increase* in the number of children appearing for these exams from 85,479 in 2005 to 1,05,332 in 2008, and a huge increase in the number of children being declared successful in these exams, up from 41,056 in 2005 to 88,151 in 2008, an increase of 114%. While analyzing the impact of the reforms introduced over the past 3 years, it has been found that if the average annual increase in the pass percentage and the number of students passing over 7 years till 2005 had continued, it would have taken almost 16 years to reach the present pass percentage of 84% and almost 26 years to reach the present level of number of students passing. That it actually took only 3 years to reach these levels proves the effectiveness of the reforms introduced over the past 3 years.

Enrolment has increased by around 1,00,000 students in 2008 recording overall an increase of 20% in the total enrolment over just 3 years. The drop out levels in the primary classes is now 0% and in upper primary, thanks to the No Retention Policy there are no dropouts. A host of initiatives under the banner of YUVA have been introduced to make schools a more attractive place and learning joyful, interesting and meaningful, so that children have a desire to go to school and continue there. These include Local Tours, Outstation Tours, Caltoonz(Animated Curriculum), Eco Club, YUVA

Club, Sports and Games, Project Raksha(Self Defence), Building as Learning Aid (BaLA), Kitabi Magic (Reading), Mental Maths, Quizzes, Debates, Elocution, Home Science Labs in all Boy's schools, and provision of LCD projectors. Significantly, from 2007 all students from Standards I to VIII now receive a complete set of free textbooks which are printed by the Department, and those in Standards IX to XII are given an allowance to purchase theirs. From 2007 all students also receive allowances for their uniform and students upwards of Standard VIII now get free geometry boxes and a comprehensive Question Bank Book every year. The Department has also introduced a No Retention policy from 2008 and no child from Standard I to VIII is left behind. A major Public Private Partnership with the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) and Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS) called "Roopantar" has been launched in 2008 to completely renovate one – third of our schools. The next phase of "Roopantar" will see the balance schools similarly renovated.

We have achieved our goals "not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially". **In a short span of 3 years we have not just turned the system around, we have almost rebuilt it.** An Executive Summary of our achievements can be perused in Session 1.10(b) Making a Difference to Others, in Module One of the YUVA School Life Skills Programme (SLP).

It is important to understand that Teachers in Government Schools in India literally hold the future of their students in their hands. Children who fail once or repeatedly usually drop out of the system as do those who find the school environment unfriendly and unattractive. A few, including those in Standards 6, 7 and 8 even commit suicide. Many others go on to become untrained, unskilled workers. The Delhi Police have estimated that more than 90% of crime is committed by persons who never passed Standard X. Children who drop out are also ill-equipped to deal with life's challenges and are unable in most cases to be productive, healthy, and responsible members of civil society. A good school and education however can help to drastically change this, giving the students a chance at a better life. The contribution of a good Teacher is therefore immeasurable.

A picture speaks a thousand words and this heartwarming, touching photograph from the May 30th 2008 Delhi edition of the Indian Express says every thing there is to say about the impact that a good Teacher has on the lives of her students and their families. One look at this photograph and it makes all the hard work worthwhile. It is one of my personal favourites and many of us who were preparing these YUVA SLP Handbooks glanced at it frequently. As I write we are receiving very positive news that after decades many Delhi Government Schools (DGS) are being seen by the middle class as an alternative to 'private' schools. This is no mean feat and was achieved thanks to all the reforms under YUVA. Some of these are detailed out in these SLP Handbooks while others are described in this Department's Quick Report 2008 (Updated)*.

After a very exhaustive and comprehensive inquiry we identified what we finally, and very fondly call YUVA Skills. These are overarching skills which have given rise in turn to the Vision, Strategies and the Delivery Processes which have made these successes possible. We have very consciously and deliberately decided to call them Skills because they can be learnt (taught) and anyone can acquire them. Most importantly, they represent the first of all the reforms – a reform in the thinking processes.



A student at a Government school brings the good news to her mother. She has scored 67 per cent in the CBSE exams. Photo by Ravi Batra – Indian Express 30 May 2008

* This can be seen at the Department's website www.edudel.nic.in

YUVA SKILLS

- 1) Be Positive.
- 2) Make the Right Choices.
- 3) Do your Best.
- 4) Value yourself, and others.
- 5) Believe that there is a Purpose and Meaning to everything you do.
- 6) Listen to your Heart.

These are described later on.

These YUVA Skills led to the enunciation of:

THE VISION

All children in Delhi shall receive learning that helps them to be happy, responsible, healthy and productive citizens.

THE STRATEGIES

- 1) To empower all Teachers by affirming and validating them so that they feel valued and have a sense of self-worth, to provide enabling resources and a responsive, caring environment so that they can reach their full potential and achieve the stated goals.
- 2) Make Learning Joyful, Interesting and Meaningful.

THE DELIVERY PROCESSES

1. Upgrading Human Resources

a) The first kind of professional development that we implemented focused largely on improving exam scores - "teaching to the test". This is described in the Quick Report. This training was absolutely essential because 52% of our students could not pass the Std X exams in 2005 which we considered totally unacceptable. It also included elements of the Life Skills training given below.

b) The second kind of professional development which we simultaneously implemented was based on Life Skills Education, as per the concepts laid down under the YUVA Skills, and this is described in these Handbooks. YUVA Skills based education has enabled our Teachers to make classroom teaching enjoyable and meaningful, thereby increasing learning levels and scores. It emphasizes the need for Teachers and Parents to create a caring and nurturing environment in schools, not to ever use corporal punishment, and to be sensitive towards their students' needs. **YUVA Skills all focus on values and principles, ethics and honesty, and on building the character of a student.**

2. Being a Positive and Responsive Employer

This Delivery Process flows entirely from the YUVA Skills and it has been instrumental in making Teachers and Principals feel valued, and in giving to them what they needed to excel. This is described in detail in the Quick Report.

3. Improving the Infrastructure

- a) Issues concerning construction, child friendly designs, and major civil works are featured in the Quick Report.
- b) All aspects of improvement of the school environment related to the running of the school, the building, and the furniture, and which are decided by the Principal, Teachers, Parents and students through a decentralised, participatory approach are covered in these YUVA SLP Handbooks such as the Vidyalaya Kalyan Samiti (VKS) including BalA and Bal Bhagidari, minor civil works and repairs, horticulture works, minor electrical works and repairs, other works and purchase of furniture.

4. Using E-Governance

This is described in detail in the Quick Report.

5. Ensuring that Learning in schools is Joyful, Interesting and Meaningful.

This is covered entirely in these YUVA SLP Handbooks.

The first four Delivery Processes are being implemented since mid 2005 when YUVA was launched. Some parts of the fifth Delivery Process are in all schools while the rest will also reach all schools shortly. In his book 'The World is Flat' Thomas L. Friedman has quoted Stanley Fischer, the former deputy managing director of the IMF as saying "One good example is worth a thousand theories". There is nothing theoretical about YUVA - it is an example which has been working successfully since July 2005 and this has been possible entirely because everyone has worked together as a Team – from the Secretary to the Director, to the Regional Directors, Deputy Directors, Education Officers, Deputy Education Officers, Principals and Teachers, as well as all the officials in the Headquarters – the Additional Directors, Joint Directors, Deputy Directors and Assistant Directors, and of course the students themselves. **All the achievements belong equally to all the members of this Team. Additionally, in a year when India won 3 medals at the Beijing Olympic Games, we are proud to have trained one of these medalists – Sushil Kumar. Our Sports Branch was also included in all the YUVA activities, and the YUVA Skills have worked their magic there too!**

One of our biggest reforms has been to actively involve all Parents in the education process in their child's school. The Vidyalaya Kalyan Samiti (VKS) gives Parents a say in decision making and a voice in how the funds under the VKS shall be utilized. Our Teachers and Principals also reach out to Parents at every opportunity. This was considered essential because a school alone cannot guide or nurture a child. We cannot hope that YUVA classes that reassure a dark skinned girl that she is worthy of love will be successful if her family at home is constantly giving her the opposite message. The YUVA SLP Handbooks that you are now holding are in fact as much for Parents as they are for Teachers. They are also for all Teachers who are Parents, and they will be shared with Parents of all students. We have received requests to put these on sale in both English and Hindi so that all Parents can have access to it and this request is presently under consideration.

We have been able to introduce a slew of educational and systemic reforms under YUVA and have demonstrated sustained improvement. Our focus on the professional development of Teachers both in teaching to the test and in the area of Life Skills and what we call YUVA Skills has reaped rich dividends. Our Teachers are no longer isolated

individuals; they are a part of a very cohesive whole. But when we started on our journey under YUVA to improve the quality of education in Delhi Government Schools (DGS) we certainly didn't expect what actually happened. **We didn't quite anticipate that we would need to conduct so many training programmes and that they would ultimately feature meditation, laughter, interactive sessions with brave people, case studies of Hindi films, yoga, spirituality and huge doses of motivation. We were very clear that under YUVA we wanted our Teachers and Principals to be positive individuals who genuinely cared about the well – being of their students. We wanted them to attend to their schools on time and to teach, to be sensitive to the needs of their students and care about their mental well being, their health, their future, and their happiness. We wanted schools to be lively, creative places bustling with activity, laughter and joy.**

But that is not quite as we started. What makes YUVA unique is that it evolved and grew as a response to all the challenges as they emerged. In the beginning we were basically targeting specific issues-increasing the academic performance at the Standards X and XII CBSE Board exams, reducing drop out levels, increasing the enrolment (especially of girls and out of school children), improving the buildings and the school environment. Other issues which were of concern were the use of corporal punishment, security and safety in schools and the spiraling increase in student suicides. The situation in schools was a cause of concern, in fact alarm. 52% of all students sitting for the Standard X CBSE Board exams couldn't pass, the drop out rates were upto 40% for classes between Standards VI and VIII, and upto 60% of all students in Standards VI, VII and VIII were failing multiple subjects and were being "retained" in the class. Student suicides on account of academic related issues such as pressure of exams, and repeated failings were increasing. Teacher absenteeism was very high and too many Teachers' seemed unconcerned about their students. The school buildings were mostly dull, drab and grey, badly maintained and with poor infrastructure particularly in terms of toilets, water, laboratories, libraries, school furniture, and even basic fittings such as lights and fans. An incident which took place shortly after I joined the Department in May 2005 exemplifies the situation at that time. The Delhi Government runs a school in the Estate of the President of India largely for the children of the employees there. One day I was summoned to Rashtrapati Bhawan and the extreme displeasure of the President of India, Shri APJ Abdul Kalam, at the deplorable condition of the school was conveyed to me. Not only were all the problems I have just cited present in this school but the utter disregard, callousness and sheer bad behavior of some Teachers and Principals was on show one day when the President decided to pay a visit to the school. Since it is located inside his Estate there is no specific security routine and senior officers are not invited. However when the President of India reached the school he was shocked to find that both the Principal and Vice-Principal were not in the school! Only the security guard of the school was present at the gate to receive him. This was inspite of the fact that the school had been told at least a week in advance about the visit. This is a clear case of dereliction of duty and utter discourtesy, but unfortunately, it was all too common. After we transferred the Principal and Vice-Principal and started action against them, both tried to get the orders reversed. There was not one word of apology, or promise of reform. Again, a cycle which was all too familiar. If this is how the system responded to the highest functionary in the country, one can imagine the plight of the poor children.

Another incident narrated by a Parent drew our attention to another problem. Her child was studying for the Board exams from a 'private' school and she had employed a private tutor for her. She was shocked to learn one day that he was a senior Teacher in a Government School. How then was he able to give private tuitions at 11 am when he was a Teacher in a morning shift school? The Teacher told her that he had an "arrangement" with the school Principal whereby she allowed him to be absent while recording him present in the attendance register, while he shared his earnings with her. Shocking no doubt but it reaffirmed what we had heard from many sources, that many of our Teachers remained

absent, and were much in demand in the private tuition market. A little unofficial detective work also revealed that these very same Teachers had the worst performances in terms of their students in the Government schools, and the highest levels of absenteeism. On another occasion, responding to many comments from students that their Teachers were always sleeping in school, we traced it to a separate group of Teachers who though attending school during the day, spent almost the whole night coaching private students for medical and engineering entrance exams. They could hardly keep their eyes open during school hours. The performance of their students in Government Schools was also very poor. There was yet a third category of Teachers who though largely attending school and being wide awake were mostly ineffective in the classroom. An incident narrated by Shri Ashok Ganguly, the former Chairman CBSE illustrates this. He paid a surprise visit to a school (not in Delhi) and sat on the last row of a Primary class. He sat the whole day and yet not one of the Teachers noticed him. Now Shri Ganguly looks like a nice grandfather and has totally white hair! How was it possible that none of the Teachers noticed that one of their eight year olds had suddenly metamorphosed into an old man? It was possible because they were not doing their work ethically, they would not even *look* at their students let alone interact with them. They would enter the class and either teach with their backs to the children and facing the blackboard, or bark out a few instructions to the students. From students all over Delhi we learnt that things were largely the same in most of their schools. This category comprised the bulk of the Teachers but it also emerged that they were generally well meaning. This was crucial as this group have been most responsible for the turnaround.

And yet there was hope. Our inquiries led us to some amazing Teachers and Principals who were doing outstanding work. Their sincerity and dedication in even the most difficult circumstances was awe inspiring. They taught children from the most disadvantaged sections of society, their learning achievement levels were the highest and not only was their pass percentages very high, even 100%, their schools were clean and the best maintained, and most importantly, their students were happy. This group of committed Teachers and Principals exhibited high levels of integrity and principles. All of them without exception, cared about their students and had created nurturing environments in their schools.

However, as a consequence of this overall state of affairs there appeared to be a universal demand for the Government to hand over its schools to NGOs or to the private sector "as it obviously couldn't run them". A new movement to introduce vouchers was introduced and was getting support from parents who were obviously fed up. The Planning Commission would frequently point to Delhi's terrible drop out levels which were the highest in the country. The Ministry of Human Resource Development in a ranking of states in 2005 gave Delhi the 35th position' out of 35 States and Union Territories. The Courts frequently commented on the sad state of affairs and educationists based in Delhi spent considerable time criticizing us in meetings and in the media. The President of India wanted to hand over the school in his Estate (referred to earlier) to an educational NGO since the Government obviously couldn't run it properly.

There were two choices before us. – let things be, or change them. We choose the latter and so started a fascinating voyage that culminated in sweeping educational and systemic reforms that brought about the phenomenal improvements referred to in the beginning of this Introduction.

I have already mentioned in the Quick Report that the biggest challenge everyone faces in the Government are the numbers – we in Delhi directly handle almost 1000 schools, 35,000 Teachers and staff, and around 1.2 million students. The very thought of educational and systemic reforms for such a huge system is daunting, but we approached it the only way we could – positively. Instead of being intimidated we chose to treat it as a unique opportunity – it because a privilege to be in a position to make a difference to so many. Although I could never hope to directly reach out to over a million students, I could however directly reach out to the 30,000 Teachers in the DGS. **We therefore decided to meet directly**

with all the Teachers so that we could convey the Vision and the Goals clearly with the minimum "transmission loss". This turned out to be one of the most significant decisions we made under YUVA as it enabled me and others to cut through seven layers of bureaucracy in between, and we are indeed very grateful to all the colleges of Delhi University for permitting us to use their auditoriums over the past few years as this allowed us to interact with upto 500 Teachers at a time. In this way we met all our Teachers and gave them an opportunity to speak, and what we heard really surprised us. We were all talking about the schools and the students but all they spoke about was themselves. They spoke about their personal problems at home with their family members and *they* spoke about their problems with the Principals and the officials of the Department. They spoke about their disillusionment with their career, with the delays in promotions, the absence of transparency in all dealings especially transfers, with the way they were treated both within and outside the system, and with insecurity in schools. They complained of poor relationships, ill health, and blamed everyone for their problems from the Principal and officials, to other departments and agencies - they don't clear up the garbage outside my house, they don't do their duty, why should I do mine?; we don't get enough water on time so how can I reach school on time?; with all these power cuts I can't get my work done at home, so how can I concentrate on my school work?; the city is so unsafe, there's no regular bus to my school which is in a remote area, I need a transfer if I am to work well, and so on. However, there was one government run department which came in for praise from every single person, and not just ordinary praise but lavish praise, and that was the Delhi Metro. So I asked the Teachers "how would you like other people (your family, Parents of students, the CM, media and others) to think of you? In the same way you think of non performing departments? Or in the same way you think of the Delhi Metro?" The answer was unanimous – every single Teacher and Principal wanted that they, their school, and the Education Department, should be looked at with the same respect and pride that they looked at the Delhi Metro with.

This desire for self respect and self esteem, this need for respect from their communities, and indeed their own families, is the basic strain that YUVA has tapped into and by making it a reality for Teachers and Principals it has made possible radical reforms leading to extraordinary achievements.

It was abundantly clear that there were some very serious problems which the officials of the Department had to resolve. In retrospect I would not like to blame the Teachers and Principals, no one had cared about them, they found it difficult to care about others. **In response to what we heard, we decided on a two pronged strategy – one, to proactively work towards removing all the professional barriers and difficulties which the Teachers and Principals were facing, and two, to start large scale capacity building programmes which would equip them with both the skills to teach better, and to handle their personal problems and issues of motivation.** The first strategy which we call "Being a Positive and Responsive Employer" is handled in detail in the Department's Quick Report (Updated) 2008 and it relates how Teachers and Principals are now part of all policy and decision making, and active partners in every initiative. Issues of stagnation which had persisted for upto 6 years have been resolved and now there is no backlog in terms of promotions. Transfers have become transparent and everyone has access to the Secretary and Director, including the students. Teachers and Principals no longer receive directions on what to do, instead, *they* decide what needs to be done. There has been a huge decentralization of powers and funds in favour of the Principals, giving them more autonomy and a greater say in how their schools shall be run. Significantly, we enjoy very harmonious relations with the Principal's Association and the Government School Teachers Association (GSTA). They too can meet the Secretary and Director at any time. Both Associations have been invaluable in the achievement of all the goals, and the complete absence of any friction or discord between the 'management' and the Associations has been a boon to the system. The Quick Report also explains how the Teachers were taught skills for improved classroom teaching of subjects,

focusing on "teaching to the test". We all strongly believed that it was totally unacceptable that 52% of all our children were failing the Board exams, and capacity building programmes conducted by the SCERT and the Department took Teachers through every step of all exams from the syllabus, previous years questions papers, the pattern of giving marks, and laboratory practicals. Both these interventions are briefly given in session 10(b) of Module One of the YUVA SLP Handbook, as are two other crucial ones, namely, improving the infrastructure and using e-governance.

To my mind the most significant step was the introduction of motivational Life Skills based training and the conversion of our schools into places where learning is joyful, interesting and meaningful. These are given in all the volumes of the YUVA SLP Handbooks. It is because of all these that there is a very strong chance that all the reforms will be sustained. Once the Teachers and Principals feel valued, once they have tasted success and high levels of respect, once they are empowered to teach and to deal positively with whatever life throws at them, once they see a purpose and meaning in their school work – that is when they themselves will provide the momentum to sustain all the reforms.

In designing our response to all that was raised, one that would provide answers to the problems and suggest methodologies to reach the goals, we turned to Life Skills Education (LSE) as laid down by the World Health Organisation namely **self-awareness and empathy, creative thinking and critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving, effective communication and interpersonal skills, coping with emotions and coping with stress.** Life Skills Education are Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) of the kind now advocated by the CBSE and all educationists. We also read a very large number of books on motivation and self-help, and spoke to dozens of people of all kinds – the eternal optimist and the perennial defeatist, the positive people and the specialists in negativity, in an effort to understand what it was that made some people happy and successful. But at the end of the day our biggest Teachers were in fact – our own Teachers and Principals! From them we learnt that it is possible to be positive and even acquire a positive attitude, that it is possible to excel in even the most difficult circumstances and to make a difference to hundreds and thousands of children who come from the most vulnerable backgrounds. We found that these Teachers and Principals were self motivated and that they had high personal values and principles. All worked very hard and sincerely with integrity, commitment and dedication. They persevered even in the face of adversity, and significantly, all were very popular in their schools and were much loved and respected by their students. Moreover, they were happy in their relationships and with their families. Almost all of them smiled a lot and had a very cheerful disposition. We took everything we learnt, put it all together and evolved what we fondly call "YUVA Skills". We have consciously decided to call them skills because they can be learnt (acquired) and therefore taught, because they can be specifically used, and because their use makes all our lives so much better. The YUVA SLP Handbooks contain activities that promote the use of YUVA Skills in every day life both at home and at work. None of these are watertight, and all overlap each other. For instance, is showing appreciation an attribute of being positive? Or do we show appreciation because we made the right choice to do so? Or could it be because we value others? The fact is that the following six YUVA Skills complement each other seamlessly and need to be followed holistically and together. These YUVA Skills are:

- 1. Be Positive.** Look at the bright side of life, count your blessings, realize that things could be worse, include appreciation and gratitude in your vocabulary, smile and laugh. The first and foremost YUVA Skill which all our successful Teachers and Principals had was their utter and completely positive outlook on life- their I CAN DO spirit. They sparkled with a vitality all their own and they positively radiated energy. It was a pleasure being with them and they have constantly lifted the spirits of everyone who meets them. I can never forget one such Teacher who

had cancer. She was undergoing chemotherapy and so we thought we should delete her name from the list of Trainers for the first YUVA Training programme. Imagine our surprise and admiration, when she came directly to the training venue straight from hospital, straight from a cycle of chemotherapy. Not only that, she beamed at everyone and her face glowed with fulfillment and contentment. She is just one of many thousands of exceptionally outstanding and extraordinary Teachers, Principals and officials in our system. Both Module One: For Teachers and Parents, and Module Three: Classroom Sessions under YUVA For All, start with sessions on positive attitude. In order to explain this to children we thought a lot and tried out different methods. Then we chanced upon a very interesting story which works with everyone who reads it. It is about a woman who was always crying because whenever the weather was sunny she would think of her daughter who sold umbrellas, and would not be making any sales. When it was raining she cried all the time thinking of her other daughter who needed the sun to make pappads to sell, and would not be making any sales. So she cried all the time, the eternal pessimist, looking at only the dark side. Then she met a monk who said he would give her a magic trick so that she was always happy. This is what he told her: when it rains, think of your daughter who sells umbrellas and the huge sales she will make. When it is sunny think of all the pappads your other daughter will make and the huge amount she will be able to sell. So the old lady tried this out and lo and behold! She started smiling every day. And all by looking at the same situation from a different perspective. The old lady learnt the skill of being positive, as did thousands of our previously pessimistic and negative Teachers and Principals, all thanks to the YUVA Training Programmes. A true incident of one such Teacher-Mohan- shall be covered later on. Wherever anyone has difficulty in looking at the positive side and insists or prefers on looking at the negative side (or "bura" in Hindi) then we quote the following lines written by Kabir in the fifteenth century to them:

*Bura jo dekhna main chala, bura na miliya koi,
Jab dil khoja aapna, mujhse bura na koi.*

In essence, this means:

I went out determined to see only all that was "bad", but I couldn't find anything, Then when I searched my heart, I realized that there was no one more "bad" than me.

(Adapted)

Similarly, when we go searching for all that is positive and good in others, somewhere along the line, these very same values take up residence in our hearts, and in our lives.

- 2. Make the Right Choices.** All of us have the power of choice – the power to be positive, to forgive, to show kindness and compassion, to have values and principles, to be a person of integrity and character, to love our children, to show our appreciation. In many ways this is perhaps the most important of all, and if it came to choosing just one YUVA Skill it would be this, for if we make the right choices then all other YUVA Skills will automatically follow. However, all the other skills also work together to help us to make the right choice. The sessions in the YUVA SLP emanating from this skill are included in the Domain "Doing the Right Thing", which derives its inspiration from what Mahatma Gandhi said :

IT'S THE ACTION,
NOT THE FRUIT OF THE ACTION,
THAT'S IMPORTANT.
YOU HAVE TO DO THE RIGHT THING.
IT MAY NOT BE IN YOUR POWER,
MAY NOT BE IN YOUR TIME,
THAT THERE'LL BE ANY FRUIT.
BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN
YOU STOP DOING THE RIGHT THING.
YOU MAY NEVER KNOW WHAT RESULTS
FROM YOUR ACTION.
BUT IF YOU DO NOTHING,
THERE WILL BE NO RESULT.

- 3 Do Your Best.** Always try, persevere, don't get de-motivated or demoralized, do your best and don't worry about the rest.

During a visit to one of our schools the students staged an excellent play which they had scripted themselves. It was largely about the pressures that students today face, and at the end they presented me with a very moving poem which they had written and which has been included in Module One in session 1.3. It was a poem to their Parents and spoke about the high expectations that Parents have, and of the children's fear that they may not be able to live up to these. The poem ended with the beautiful lines:

"I may not be the brightest star but let me be *your* star
I will remain yours and yours, always".

What more touching statement can children make to their Parents. The huge pressures which Parents put on their children is causing them enormous harm. Not every child can get 90 out of 100 in all subjects, and win prizes for every thing. Let us encourage them to always do their best because that is all that any of us can do. After that, we must give them all our love for they are *our* brightest star.

Under YUVA also all we have ever expected from our Teachers and Principals is that they do their best. Not once have we raised unreasonable demands or set unrealistic, unreachable goals. Our successes are due to the simple fact that our Teachers and Principals are doing their best. This involves a lot of hard work and there are no shortcuts, but once you've done the best you will feel a huge sense of fulfillment because you know that there is nothing more you could have done.

- 4. Value Yourself and Others.** All of us are worth loving whether we are dark or fair, skinny or plump, tall or short, female or male, young or old. All of us deserve respect and we should give respect to others. All of us are equal with the same rights and duties. We should listen to others and be responsive to what they say.

In his book *Winning* Jack Welch recounts an incident where a very successful executive decides to leave her company. Why? Because although she had everything, she didn't feel "valued" there. When we started our professional development programmes and chose to give opportunities to Teachers and Principals to speak, when we *chose to hear* what they said, and when we *chose to respond* to what we heard, the Teachers came back and told us that they "felt valued". This feeling is perhaps best understood when someone is actually listening to us, when they care, and when they appreciate us (and of course, when we behave in the same way towards others).

Since it is so very pivotal there are a number of sessions in the YUVA SLP which encourage our students to adopt these steps. Being positive, valuing others and showing appreciation seems to be difficult for many people. They prefer to be critical. It is so easy to find fault, to criticize and to destroy. But it is difficult to find and give praise, to encourage and to build. In his film *Taare Zameen Par*, Aamir Khan recounts how people in a tropical island never cut trees. Instead, they all stand around the tree and criticize and abuse it. The tree gradually withers away and dies. People are also like that – constant haranguing and criticism can lead to people literally dying from inside. They are demoralized and left with no motivation to change, even if they are in the wrong. It was like that with the Education Department in 2005. A barrage of uniformly critical comments had left the Department too weak to respond positively. Appreciating others and choosing to highlight their positive traits however is a very powerful tool, as Kabir pointed out in his immortal doha:

*Aisi baani boliye, man ka aapa khoy,
Auron ko sheetal kare, aap hoon sheetal hoy*

Speak only those words which will calm your mind,
Words which will bring bliss to others, and rest your mind

(Adapted)

And so it was with the words of appreciation and the value that we gave Teachers and Principals under YUVA.

- 5. Believe that there is a Purpose and Meaning in all that you do.** The origin of this YUVA Skill can be traced to a very important experience in my life which I once shared with Teachers and Principals. It struck a chord with them and I began to quote it regularly thereafter. It happened a few years ago. A group of elderly gentlemen – all above 80 – met me regarding a case concerning them. The necessary approvals in the case had been issued but the elderly gentlemen had not received what they had been promised, and they had been waiting for many years. I called for the papers and ensured that the commitments were fulfilled, for which I took a few weeks. After that I forgot about it. A few days later one of the elderly gentlemen tried to meet me. I am normally very hospitable but it was a hot, sweltering day and everything was going wrong. We were in the midst of a serious crisis and dozens of officers were coming in and out of my office while many more sat with me poring over reports. Everything that could go wrong was going wrong and I was feeling the stress and tension. I was just not in a mood to meet the elderly gentleman, particularly since I knew that I had taken just a few weeks to fulfill a commitment to him which had been pending for many years. However after waiting for some time, he quietly walked into my office, and I am ashamed to say that all I felt at that time was irritation. But he gently folded his hands, and said softly "I have come only to say thank you". And then he quoted a few lines to me which I have never forgotten:

*Aap jo kar rahe ho,
Koi dekhe ya na dekhe,
Woh sab kuch dekh raha hai.
Aap jo kar rahe ho,
Koi dekhe ya na dekhe
Woh sab kuch dekh raha hai,
Woh aap ko sab kuch dega.*

Whatever you are doing,
Even if no one else sees,
He (God) sees everything.
Whatever you are doing,
Even if no one else sees,
He sees everything, and
He will give you everything.

It is difficult to describe the effect that his words had on all of us. There was a stunned silence, and suddenly the day was not so hot anymore. Suddenly the crisis seemed manageable. All of us went home that day with a greater sense of peace and calm. These words from a total stranger have helped me and I frequently think of them. IAS officers are privileged to be in a position where they can make a difference to many people, and I have been thanked many times in my career. But these simple words, spoken with so much kindness, touched a chord in me. It was as if the elderly gentleman could sense the turmoil and he used just the right words. It is really incredible and yet a fact of life that sometimes a perfect stranger walks into our life, or an incident happens, and things are never the same again. I never saw the elderly gentleman again but wherever he is, I thank him very much.

During our interactions with Teachers and Principals we realized that all of them were very religious, that they regularly visited their temples, masjids, churches and gurudwaras, and that they also regularly prayed to their God. Combining all that we had learnt, I narrated my experience and then gently asked our Teachers and Principals whether they believed that their God was fair and just, and could see them, and listen to their prayers? They all said yes. We then asked them whether they thought their God was happy to see the state of affairs in their school? Could their God really grant all the prayers sent up by a Teacher who took a full government salary and benefits but who hardly attended school or always reached late, or didn't bother to teach his/her class, who was insensitive to the needs of the students and used corporal punishment? We went on to gently explain that just as they went to a temple, masjid, gurudwara or church – *their school was also their* temple, masjid, gurudwara and church and teaching children and giving them a chance at a better life was "Punya ka Kaam", literally, God's work.

Later on during a training session one of our Teachers recited a stirring couplet by the Urdu poet Nida Fazli which further affirmed that helping our students was surely a way to God:

*Masjid hain yahaan se door, chalo aisa kar le,
Kisi rote huye bachche ko hasaya jaye*

The Masjid is far from here, let us then wipe the tears of a child and
Bring a smile to his face, for in doing so we will find our Lord

(Adapted)

After we allowed all schools to screen good films, including Hindi films, one of the most popular choices was the film 'Iqbal'. At another training session a Teacher quoted from a song from this film, written by Irfan Siddique:

*Kuch aisa karke dikha,
Khud khush ho jaye khuda,*

Do Something,
Which will make God happy

(Adapted)

After that, discussing the connect between Teachers and their "Punya ka kaam" is part of all our activities. In all my interactions with Teachers and Principals only one said that he was not religious but he went on to add that he believed in the Bhagwad Gita's dictum "work is worship". Spirituality has therefore played a role in this Department's successes and I have lost count of the large number of Teachers and Principals who have thanked me for this approach explaining that with this connect, they are now feeling a deep, abiding sense of fulfillment and contentment with their work, and in their lives.

6. Listen to your Heart The sixth and last YUVA Skill is the simplest, and yet sometimes the hardest to follow. There are many things that all of us want to do, many paths we want to follow but we are stopped from doing so because we end up listening more to our mind. Our mind is not as courageous as our heart and it all too frequently keeps telling us why we can't do something, or reminding us of what "other people are saying" - that we can't improve our academic results (What are you thinking of Rina? Your children come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Be happy if you get even a 2% annual increase);

that we can't provide motivational training to our Teachers in batch sizes of 500 (What are you doing Rina? Don't you know that Teacher training should only be imparted to around 30 Teachers at a time?);

that we can't talk about spirituality (What are you doing Rina? Running a spiritual T.V channel?);

that we can't think creatively and critically and evolve a hypothesis that all children are capable of passing exams and that all they need to achieve this is for their Teachers to teach them with integrity (What? What are you saying? Of course it's not true, otherwise someone else would have said so in India and proved it long before you);

that we can't send students on local or outstation tours, or renovate the buildings, or introduce BaLA (Why are you insisting madam? Don't you know how much money all this will cost?) and so on.

During our interactions with the most successful Teachers and Principals in the system we noticed how most of them frequently referred to their "dil" (heart). When I asked them how they were able to achieve such magnificent triumphs in the face of so much adversity their replies would largely be along the following: "Mujhe dil se laga yeh sahi hai" (I felt from my heart that this was the right thing to do); "Mera dil ne kaha - karo! Bas, main ne kar liya" (My heart said-do it! That's it, I did it); "Main ne dil ki sooni" (I listened to my heart).

Looking back, I do feel that our successes have been largely due to our ability to listen to our heart, for it is our heart which always tells us where our passions and responsibilities lie, and it shows us the 'right' way. Listening to your heart is being true to yourself, as Shakespeare said in Hamlet:

This above all to thine own self be true,
And it must follow as the night the day,
thou cannot be false to any man.

Following your heart however is seldom easy and too many people and circumstances seem to conspire to make us listen to the voices of negativity and of fear in our mind. When some of our Teachers stood their ground and introduced joyful learning methodologies at a time when it was not officially sanctioned, and their Principal and officials harassed them for it, they drew strength from being true to their selves and in doing the right thing.

When a Principal disregarded conventional wisdom, and again overruled her officials to admit mentally challenged students to her school, she was walking alone because she believed in what she was doing. This reminded me of Rabindra Nath Tagore's poem which I learnt as a child:

Jodi tor dak shune keu na ashe tobe ekla cholo re

If no one hears your call, then walk alone.

If they are afraid and sit silently facing the wall, open your mind and speak out alone.

If they turn away and desert you when crossing the wilderness,
Trample the thorns under your feet and walk alone.

If they do not hold up the light when the night is troubled with storm,
Ignite your own heart with the flame of pain, and let it burn alone.

(Adapted)

It was because we were true to ourselves and listened to our heart that YUVA was born, and the spectacular achievements listed out in session 10(b) of Module One became possible.

It was essential of course to equip students with the skills to follow a similar approach. The YUVA SLP not only directly provokes lateral thinking through PMI activities but the thread of "listening to the voice of your heart, your conscience" runs through all the sessions and all the games, role-plays and particularly the individuals whose stories have been included. All of these reinforce the same message - have the courage to walk alone if necessary, but be true to yourself. This is essential because all the great inventions and positive developments have come about because people believed in what they were doing. If India is to be a developed country, a Government run education system with over a million students must encourage them to have the courage of their beliefs. Sometimes the path may be a solitary one, and the words of Henry David Thoreau can help us when we are in doubt:

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.
Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away"

The YUVA SLP has four parts which are called Modules. Module One is for Teachers and Parents and should be covered at all interactions including inspections, meetings and training sessions. It does not therefore require any additional classroom time.

Module Two is on ways to make the existing classroom sessions joyful and this also does not need any extra classroom time.

Modules Three and Four are classroom sessions for students in classes VI to XII and they need a total of 24 hours extra time every year to be conducted.

The origins of these sessions go back to the Adolescence Education Programme (AEP) developed in November 2005 in association with the Delhi State AIDS Control Society (DSACS). Although a few sessions were considered controversial the rest were unanimously approved. At the same time, many Central and State Ministries and Departments asked us to incorporate and introduce various topics in the classroom. Other stakeholders suggested we introduce other new areas. There was a lot of pressure to set up 'Clubs' on a slew of topics and to devote considerable classroom time to the related activities of these clubs. We reviewed the position and we came to the conclusion that it was inadvisable to set up dozens of clubs in all schools promoting dozens of activities with each catering only to a handful of students. *The time being demanded for each topic was also impractical as most wanted instruction time of at least 15-20 hours a year.* If we had agreed to all the proposals then our students would have spent more time on these activities than on the school curriculum, and the whole day in school. We therefore had to step in, and we decided to set up only one more club in all schools, for all students, in addition to the existing Eco-Club and that was the YUVA Club. This will look after all other activities in the school. We decided to create sessions on most of the topics referred to us, but in view of the fact that this would be a totally new programme, we consciously decided to restrict it in the initial stage to just 24 hours of extra classroom instructional time every year. And so was born the YUVA SLP and these Handbooks. This present version is in English, and the Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi editions will be ready shortly. We have emphasized to our Teachers that communication is the most crucial issue, and that they may conduct the sessions in whatever language they normally use in the classroom. Teachers have also been given the freedom to modify the sessions if they feel it is necessary. As to who will conduct the sessions, it will be upto the Principal to consult her Teachers and make the decision. We hope that everyone will volunteer!

Module One – For Teachers and Parents

Module One, which is contained in Volume One, is for self study by Teachers (and here we include Principals and officials), and Parents. It is to be discussed at all interactions between the Principals and Teachers, at meetings of the VKS (Vidyalaya Kalyan Samiti) and PTA (Parent Teacher Association) and also read at home. **It is entirely a codification of what has happened, and what has been found to work. It uses fictional Teachers Sunaina (very positive), Shikha (very negative) and Mohan (who moves from being negative to positive after acquiring YUVA Skills) but all the facts stated are true incidents actually narrated by Teachers during various training programmes.** The truly amazing part has been the transformation in the Teachers and even I am constantly surprised at the huge changes that the YUVA trainings have brought about. We have had Teachers who have openly expressed that their relationships with their students has improved and that they now have better communications with their elderly parents – some in fact were communicating openly with their parents, spouses and children for the first time in their lives. It was like some kind of dam had burst and everyone wanted to share their feelings and experiences. I have witnessed for myself how utterly negative Teachers have become happy, positive ones and I can vouch for the fact that YUVA Skills are indeed skills which can be learnt to make all our lives better.

Module One also has a very powerful letter from Ms. Nilam Katara. A Teacher herself, she reached out and touched our Teachers in a way that very few people have, and when she shared her story of bravery and courage, of the choices before her, there used to be pin drop silence in the sessions. At the end, YUVA's simple message was: all of us may not

have the same strength as Nilam Katara, but can we at least muster a *little* bit of that strength to make both our own lives and that of our students a better one? When Nilam Katara does not complain – inspite of the huge catastrophe that happened in her life -can all of us, who face such tiny discomforts in comparison, find the fortitude and strength to stop being so negative? Can we at least try to be positive? The answer in every session has been a resounding yes!

The Hindi Film "Taare Zameen Par" came at just the right time for YUVA. It is a superb film and may have been made to highlight the problems that children with learning disabilities face but because it is so well researched and realistic, it has actually become a window into the status of most school education in India. The amazing part about the film is that it lends itself to so many situations that we realised that we could teach almost everything from it. The first half is all about wrong practices, both by the Teachers and the Parents. It exhibits joyless learning, insensitivity, corporal punishment, withdrawal, tendency towards extreme measures (suicide?) negative teaching, passive learning, child abuse, and overall depicts a classroom which unfortunately too many people recognize. But the second half brilliantly portrays the correct practices that make up a child friendly school. The new Teacher empathises with the child and shows care and concern, he adopts joyful learning practices and believes in the theory of multiple intelligence, drawing out the child's enormous creative talents. He does not pass judgment, does not embarrass the child in front of others, and establishes a bond with him. He converts a previously threatening environment into a nurturing one. The film has come as a real boon and it is extensively used to teach Teachers on what they should be doing in the classroom. It is also used to drive home the deep pain and anguish that a child feels when she is in a negative situation in school. I have seen our Teachers, both men and women, cry silently when the song "Maa" comes on, and the expression on their faces when the child Ishaan is subjected to abuse. **The film lays the perfect foundation on which to build a discussion on why and how to create a nurturing school with caring Teachers.**

During our interactions with students one of the biggest problems they mentioned was the difference between what adults were telling them, and what adults were actually doing, both at home, in school and in society at large. The students sensed this dichotomy and the examples they quoted were many. The YUVA TSG therefore decided to evolve a session for Teachers and Parents on their responsibilities as role-models. It may sound incredible to many people but too many of our Teachers felt that children had only responsibilities and no rights, that they should be grateful for whatever they receive and should quietly accept it, never once questioning the adults in their life. Their attitude was that schools had not been set up to provide education to children but to provide employment to Teachers! Sessions on adults as role models, what children are learning from us, and on the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child have therefore been incorporated.

As I have mentioned earlier, spirituality is an integral part of all YUVA Skills and in the background of increasing tensions amongst communities, our Teachers, Principals and Parents felt it was essential that the YUVA SLP highlighted all that was good in all religions, drawing our students' attention to the commonality in all their basic messages. Significantly this opens a doorway for them to read further and explore the true tenets of all religions. We have therefore included some of the wisest words of wisdom in the session 1.9 "All Under the Same Heaven" in Module One.

The approach towards Spirituality and its purpose in YUVA is best summed up in the words of Swami Vivekananda in his historic address to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. He said: "I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: *'As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.* Sectarianism bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled

the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time has come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal".

We realized that almost all our Teachers, complained of poor health but, consistently ignored their health. We have therefore incorporated sessions on this topic which include simple yoga asanas, instructions on a healthy diet, and clarify questions on what a general check up means and how a Teacher should approach this crucial step. The sessions are structured to answer the concerns raised by our Teachers and Principals during numerous interactions.

Till here, Module One is largely about Teachers and Parents making a difference to themselves. Through a letter from Virender Sehwal we introduce them to how they make a difference to others. In his letter, Virender Sehwal, a former Delhi Government School student, acknowledges the enormous role that his Teacher played in his success and asks all Teachers and Parents to identify the various talents that their children have. The last session is actually a reproduction of the Executive Summary in the Department's Quick Report 2008 (Updated) which clearly reveals the phenomenal difference that our Teachers have made.

Module Two – Joyful Learning

Module Two of the YUVA SLP is all about turning the school environment into a joyful one where the learning is interesting and meaningful. Module Two is contained in Volume 2, (although all the Volumes contribute towards joyful learning.) It includes those schemes which are part of the YUVA Plan Scheme and initiatives and are universal to all schools (such as Local and Outstation Tours, VKS, BaLA, CaltoonZ, Project Raksha, Mental Maths, Cultural Activities, Sports and Games) and those activities which are presently being undertaken in some schools but which under the YUVA SLP and through the YUVA Clubs, will now be followed by all schools (joyful learning particularly in primary classes, debates, elocutions, extemporary speaking, laughter therapy, meditation, quizzes, games).

One of the most successful components of YUVA has been the **Local and Outstation Tours**. We realised that in many ways the history of Delhi has played a major role in the history of India for the last 1000 years. Our students study about such things as the Iron Pillar at Mehrauli which is a scientific marvel because although it is over 1600 years old, it hasn't rusted. They also read about the imposing Qutab Minar and the majestic Red Fort, both World Heritage Sites. Their history lessons are replete with references to events in Delhi such as the dawn of independence in Parliament on 15th August 1947, and the site of the tragic assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Delhi has been witness to the First War of Independence in 1857 and it was the seat of the mighty Mughal Empire. It's every nook and corner has breathtakingly beautiful sites from lavish and spectacular parks and gardens like the Lodhi Gardens, to majestic historical buildings like Rashtrapati Bhavan and Parliament, and awe inspiring monuments like Purana Qila and India Gate. **Our students study about all these in their text books, they live in the same city where these marvels are to be found, but we realised that hardly any of them had actually seen any of these! Our expectation that our children will grow up to respect their impressive and valuable cultural heritage, that they will protect monuments rather than deface them, that they will understand and value their enormous cultural legacy, therefore seemed both ambitious and unrealistic.** In order to bridge this gap, we started the **Local Tours** under YUVA and now every student of a DGS- from Standard I to XII- goes on at least one excursion within Delhi every year. These are full day trips and are usually structured in such a way that students visit one museum, one park and one monument on each trip. Refreshments

are given twice, including a lunch packet. The actual selection of where to go depends on the age of the children and their choice. Younger students like the Rail Museum at Chanakayapuri, the Nehru Planetarium, and the Zoo while older students also enjoy the Parliament Museum and National Museum. A very interesting fact which has emerged since these Local Tours started is that most of our children have apparently never stepped out of their neighborhood. Most, it would appear, attend a nearby DGS school and live and grow up in the same locality. We therefore design the routes in such a way that students are able to see as much of their city as possible as part of the Local Tour. For example, students from South Delhi visit North Delhi and follow one route to reach there, and a different one on the return.

The Local Tours have been an unqualified success and it is not uncommon to see bus loads of excited DGS students crossing the river Yumuna or a national highway for the first time in their lives, especially when the weather is pleasant. The implications of over a million children and their accompanying Teachers criss crossing the city are quite astonishing. Over 20,000 bus trips are made, and our students munch their way through millions of sandwiches, apples and bananas, gulp down thousands of liters of fruit juice and pay entry fees to the government equivalent to that paid by other visitors. In fact, when representatives of other State Governments express apprehensions that their State may not be able to afford the huge expense of Local Tours, I point out the advantages to everyone concerned. For example, **the Director of the National Science Centre Shri Khened has frequently referred to the fact that the Centre is receiving the highest number of visitors ever all thanks to DGS students. This huge increase in foot falls is enabling him to leverage higher funding and improved facilities for the Centre.** The expense on the Local Tours is therefore largely ploughed back to the government and to the economy, enabling the various sites to improve their facilities. Most importantly, the children have the time of their lives and they learn valuable, life long lessons on their heritage and city.

We are only in the third year of Local Tours but are preparing to move into the next phase of more structured trips, for example this would include heritage walks organised by INTACH and others, visits to the Air Force base etc. Also on the anvil are trips to water and sewerage treatment plants, power plants, milk producing units, and Delhi Metro to learn how they function and answer basic questions like: where does the power in my school and home come from? The Department is tying up with the Delhi Jal Board, Delhi Metro, Power Department, Mother Dairy and others in this regard. Visits to places that would interest children particularly those in junior classes will also be added such as to the Jain Bird Hospital, Animal Shelters, and Railway Station to learn how trains work.

Students of Standard XI also go on **Outstation Tours** to locations outside Delhi to learn about their country and its rich diversity. Again, the tours are structured in such a way that at least 2 or 3 major points are covered, for example, one of the most popular tours is Amritsar (Golden Temple) - Wagah Border- Dalhousie (or any other hill station). Students and their Teachers have discovered the joys of visiting the mountains in winter as they get to see and feel something they had only heard of and seen on TV and films- snow. Other popular destinations are Agra to see the Taj Mahal, and all places in Rajasthan, particularly the desert. Delhi in fact is very fortunately located and some of India's most awe inspiring natural and man made wonders are within easy reach, from the lofty peaks and verdant valleys of the proud Himalayas to the sand dunes of deserts, from silent jungles to swiftly flowing rivers, and from borders with other states to a border with another country. It was decided to extend this opportunity to Standard XI students alone for a number of reasons - they are at an important and crucial stage when they are young enough to be impressionable, and yet mature enough to take care of themselves because safety is our upper most concern on these tours. Additionally, by restricting it to one class we can ensure that no student goes on an outstation tour more than once, *and that ultimately all students in DGS get this opportunity.* In addition to Teachers, one Parent also accompanies the Tours. For the moment the Department has made

arrangements largely with the Indian Railways who organise and conduct the tours. The Railways were chosen because most children have never travelled by train. It also allows us to save time and yet send the students to destinations further away such as Goa (another favourite!). The school students, their Teachers and Principal however have the complete freedom to decide the destinations and the routes, as well as the dates. **The learning experiences for the students have been immeasurable, for the girl students from the Chandni Chowk area who had never stepped out of their neighborhood a trip to Jaipur and Mount Abu was a once in a lifetime experience, for the girls from Rajokri village who had never even crossed the national highway just a few kilometers from their residences, a trip to Shimla and Manali was a dream come true, for the boys from the slums of South Delhi and East Delhi, a visit to the Wagah Border and Dalhousie meant they saw snow for the first time, and also witnessed one of the most poignant and elaborate ceremonial functions in the country- the lowering of the Indian flag every evening at our border with Pakistan.**

These children are not just studying about unity in diversity and the rich fabric of their country, they are experiencing it first hand. Their view of the world has changed and their horizons have expanded to encompass smells, tastes, and colours they never imagined of before.

The students have a great time on these tours, and the accompanying Teachers and Parents enjoy themselves too. So high are the satisfaction levels that as I write, hundreds of officials, students and Teachers are poring over maps and railway time-tables, excitedly trying to work out new routes such as a tour to Sikkim and Darjeeling, with a visit to a Tiger Reserve and a few other famous places too!

I noticed that for some season or the other only girls were participating in dances and other performances during **cultural** functions. If a co-educational school was involved there used to be a few boys, but usually from the junior classes alone. Singing and dancing was clearly a "girls thing" in the DGS. This was a shame because all children love to play and dance, it's a wonderful way to express creativity, and it uses up valuable energy in a productive activity. We therefore set up YUVA Clubs in all schools including the boy's schools, and started to involve them in various functions (these **YUVA Clubs** now oversee the entire YUVA initiative). We roped in the State Culture Department and the Sahitya Kala Parishad who brought in professional choreographers. In order to attract the boys, interesting dances based on martial arts were introduced such as Kalaripettu from Kerala. Giving the boys fake swords and shields and martial dance steps has been a good idea and now boys are equal participants in all cultural functions. We take care to ensure that the items are as eclectic as possible and that all dance forms and dances from all states and UTs are covered. Now our DGS students dance to the rhythm of the Mizo bamboo dance and the Assamese Bihu, they sway to the tune of a Maharashtrian fishing community dance and a folk dance from Kashmir, they match steps in a Manipuri martial dance and in one from Kerala, and they jive happily to a modern dance. We have also incorporated semi-classical dances based on Kathak and Bharat Natyam into the schools' repertoire. Singing, another area which we keenly focus on, also appeared to be an area where girls had grabbed the limelight. So once again we brought the boys back into the picture and now they also sing along with the girls at all functions. The YUVA Clubs are also meant for Teachers, to encourage and identify the vast pool of talent that DGS has. This year's School calendar for instance features painting made by our gifted drawing and painting Teachers, and students. We have also incorporated other aspects of creativity such as theatre and painting into our school schedule. We plan on conducting a mammoth YUVA Talent search during 2009 starting at the school level and going onto the zonal, district and finally State levels, to identify our most gifted singers, dancers and actors, both from amongst the students and the Teachers. Cultural activities have always been a strong point of DGS, but our focus on involving everyone including boys and Teachers, on bringing in professional choreographers,

and on embracing all aspects of song and dance from all parts of the country, has paid rich dividends. All these activities have made schools a more joyous place. They are helping students, both those who are good and not so good in studies, to explore new areas and tap hidden talents. I can recall numerous occasions where I and the audience have sat spell bound listening to a beautiful voice, or in rapt attention watching the grace of a near perfect dance. Such talent knows no boundaries of wealth or class, and some of our most breath taking performers come from the most difficult backgrounds. Few things can equal the pleasure of seeing children excel, especially if they are from the most disadvantaged sections of society. We are confident that the YUVA Talent Search will help to ultimately bring cultural activities almost to a level with academics, and as children explore this avenue, perhaps even for future employment, it will help to considerably lessen the stress and tension caused by academics and the pressure of exams.

In the middle of 2005, the Home Secretary Shri R. Narayanaswami convened a meeting to discuss the issue of security for girls and women in Delhi. During the meeting he threw a challenge to me and to Shrimati Vimla Mehra, the Additional CP (Crimes Against Women Cell) : *could we start self defence training classes for all girl students from standard 4 right till standard 12?*. Rather bemusedly, we said yes, and so was born **Project Raksha**, an initiative under which the Delhi Police trained all the female Physical Education Teachers of DGS, NDMC and MCD schools. They in turn now train all the 6,00,000 girl students right though from Standard 4 till Standard 12 in all the three school systems. The valedictory function of the Teachers Training which was held at the Talkatora Stadium was a soul stirring, deeply impressive performance by our Teachers, and the photographs of this can be seen in Module Two of the YUVA SLP. However, towards the end of the year Shri R. Narayanaswami reviewed the project and wanted to know: had any of our girl students been able to defend herself? Was the training therefore of any use?

The truth was that none of our girls had 'defended' herself as per the training received. But somewhere along the way we realised that the real benefits of this initiative lay elsewhere. During visits to schools to see the implementation of Project Raksha, I was astounded to see the way the girls were initially doing the steps. To explain, I should clarify that Project Raksha started with 2 major features - throwing out the arms one by one and thrusting them in the air in the front of the body quite vigorously and also shouting "HO!" at the top of their voice. However the girls I saw were doing anything but that. They were very delicately raising their arms as if they were dancing in slow motion, and whispering "HO" in a soft, gentle voice. Their whole demeanor was very friendly and very graceful! Something was obviously not going right, so we discussed the issue at length with the Delhi Police, NGOs involved in women's issues and the students themselves. What emerged was rather disturbing. It appeared that when a girl is molested or attacked, all too frequently her instinctive reaction is not to defend herself by hitting out at her attacker, but rather to defend herself by 'protecting' herself, by crossing her arms against her breast or above her head and almost curling into the fetal position. It was therefore difficult for these girls to vigorously throw their arms out. Secondly the girls couldn't shout at the top of their voice because all their life they had been asked to keep quiet or talk softly 'like a girl'. Therefore, during the training sessions with the Physical Education Teachers that winter I asked them to ensure that all girls understood what they were expected to do and that they did it as laid down by the Delhi Police. *I am happy to state that there has been a lot of vigorous air punching and shouting going on in DGS since then.* The Delhi Police have also responded to requests from our Teachers and students and have started teaching them on how they can defend themselves while wearing a sari or shalwar kurta, how they can use the dupatta and text-books as 'weapons', how they should react to threats in everyday situations such as an attempted attack inside their home (use the rolling pin, spoons) or when a car approaches them for a possible abduction. Our Teachers and girls have raced through all these trainings with unbounded zeal and enthusiasm and the Department and Delhi Police are now trying to work out a curriculum on self-defence for all classes till Standard 12.

To go back to the question: have these classes therefore been of any use if no girl so far has "defended" herself? The answer to this lies in the way that these very same girls now walk and talk, *in fact, in the way they even stand* - with head held high and a definite glint in their eyes. They know that if it should ever be necessary, they have the right mental approach and the skills to defend themselves, and that is what really matters. It is this knowledge which has given them a more positive body image which, we all believe, deters would be romeos and attackers.

That students as young as 8 or 9 could be agents of change, influencing both their own and their families' actions, was perhaps first demonstrated by the **Eco Clubs**. This is an initiative pioneered by Shrimati Sheila Dikshit and implemented largely by the state Department of Environment in all DGS and most private schools in Delhi. The State Government provides an annual amount of Rs. 10,000/- per school and this has given a huge boost to the promotion of activities pertaining to the environment. Our Eco Club Teachers are amongst our brightest and their enthusiasm and commitment is infectious. Together with students they led a movement against crackers (fireworks) during Diwali, a movement that was so successful that it led to a decrease in the air pollution levels. Be it recycling paper, cultivating mushrooms, harvesting rain water, or holding and participating in painting competitions, our Eco Clubs do it all. The YUVA SLP seeks to build upon the strengths of the Eco Clubs and attempts a brief curriculum for them, laying down lesson plans for the Teachers to follow. The YUVA SLP helps to ensure a certain level of standardised teaching and activities in all Delhi Governments Schools, bringing all Teachers and students on to a common platform. It also lays down specific objectives to be reached, and provides detailed information on a wide range of issues from global warming to the extinction of species. All the sessions in the YUVA SLP on the environment were prepared in consultation with the state Department of Environment, and they are among my personal favourites. When we were preparing the session on Eco Clubs in Module Two, we were shocked at what all of us were doing to our planet. There was so much to learn and to communicate to our children that we decided on a separate section – called YUVA For All – which would repeat the vital messages, every year. We hope that the activities will become habits and that over a million students, and through them their families, will start using less water and power, reusing and recycling all waste, make compost at home, and have respect for all living things. We hope they will stop using plastic bags and make nice paper or cloth bags for their families to use, that they will plant trees, and water the 'stressed' trees on Delhi's roadsides. In fact, I find that my own habits have changed during the process of preparing and finalizing these sessions and I am a much "Greener" person than I was! It takes so little effort to pour out only as much water as I need to drink, and to put food and water out for the birds and squirrels everyday. In conjunction with sessions on out-of-the-box thinking, we hope students will start reflecting on ways to save their planet, such as by "filtering" carbon fumes through "carbon guzzling" plants and algae, so that they give off oxygen, and reduce global warming. I also cherish the fond hope that at least some of our students will work to save from extinction the tiger, the rhino, the gharial, the gangetic dolphin and all the other creatures which are being wiped out because of our insatiable lust and greed for more and more.

Pivotal to a positive school environment that fosters learning is a good school building. Features such as toilets, clean drinking water, adequate number of classrooms, and child – friendly, comfortable furniture are being provided under other initiatives of the Department, initiatives which have been detailed in the "Quick Report (Updated) 2008" which can be seen at the Department's website. Under the YUVA SLP we looked at how the building could be a joyful learning tool for children and the answer we came up with was **BaLA (Building As Learning Aid)**. Conceptualized by Kabir Vajpeyi and his team at VINYAS, BaLA is a brilliant intervention that almost immediately turns a drab, dull and grey school building into a bright, colourful and cheerful one. Under BaLA, a school which used to literally "repel" children

earlier now "attracts" them like a magnet, a magical transformation indeed. The Department worked with VINYAS on a model BaLA school building in Sawda Ghewra, developing more than 150 designs on the ground, checking their measurements and dimensions, trialling different kinds of paints and engravings, working out the approximate costing of each, and most importantly, getting feedback from the students on what they liked and didn't like, and what more they wanted. The result is a beautiful school building vibrant with colours. **I have heard of the phrase "walls that talk" but under BaLA it is not just the walls that talk but the floors, the ceilings, the windows and even the doors that talk!** And all of them say so many different things to children. It was so wonderful to see the elementary school students on their first day in the school, their eyes were wide in wonder and amazement. They ran from wall to wall trying to solve all the riddles. They stood against the height chart and checked each other's height. They played on the 'stapu' (hop-sotch) on the floor, happily jumping from one multiple of 4 to the next, they ran up and down the stairs trying out the various mathematical quizzes along the way, and tried to estimate the length and width of their classroom on the basis of the scale painted along the edge of their desks. They even 'invented' a new interpretation of a game on the floor, with half a dozen of them excitedly explaining the rules to the Chief Minister and the Minister Education. They were all speaking at the same time and the words came tumbling out so fast that none of us could understand what they were saying about the game. And yet, we *did* understand. We understood that they were thrilled to pieces, and at the end of the day that was all that really mattered. The beauty of BaLA is that all its interventions are jointly designed by the Teachers and students, and yet it really doesn't need any teaching at all. Instead, the children learn by themselves, and from each other. BaLA whets their curiosity and provokes them into finding the answers to all the "whys" around them. Thus, no explanation is given for painting a Newton's disc (all the 7 colours of the rainbow) onto the central portion of a ceiling fan. When it rotates, this part turns white. Children grow up seeing this almost daily. When the time comes for them to study about how white light is comprised of 7 colours, the learning is seamless and effortless because 'they already knew that'.

Since many of our school buildings really were dull and drab, we realized that BaLA interventions would need to include a provision for painting the walls and doors, as also railing, grills etc. We took a very conscious decision to leave the choice of colours and the selection of the interventions to the Principals through the Vidyalaya Kalyan Samiti (VKS). **This has led to the most amazing burst of creativity from most of our Principals and almost all our Schools have their own, distinctive look, thanks to BaLA.** It could be argued that some of the classrooms or buildings are so intricately or brightly painted that they "over stimulate" the child e.g. shades of purple, violet, lilac and lavender, and that there is no uniformity in our schools. But the gains from leaving the choice to the schools has been so enormous that they far outweigh other concerns. The Principals excitedly show you around their school, proudly pointing to various BaLA interventions they have selected with the children. The students are happy, and the community very satisfied. BaLA broadly falls into two types - those which can be done by the school, and those which have to be incorporated at the design stage. For the former, the Department provides an amount of Rs. 2,00,000 per building every year, and for the latter, we are sensitizing the agencies involved in the civil works. BaLA has already been incorporated into "Roopanter", a Public Private Partnership between the Department, DSIIIDC and ILFS to renovate and refurbish one-third of all DGS buildings.

BaLA has led to a transformation in buildings which is amazing, making the school environment a happy, joyful one. Our choice in terms of its methodology, namely, giving the task to the Principal, students, Teachers and Parents through the VKS, has been hugely empowering.

The ability to speak fluently in a language, to have good communication skills, and to be able to draw upon a rich vocabulary of words, are all assets everyone would be proved to possess. The YUVA SLP has introduced a number of

activities that are to be carried out regularly with the students for the purpose of developing these qualities in them. The first is **elocution** – students memorise a famous speech or a passage from a literary work, and deliver it before the class with the appropriate inflexions. Popular choices are 'Sarfarooshi ki Tamanna' by Ram Prasad Bismil, and works by Premchand, Nirala and Jai Shankar Prasad in Hindi. In English the most recited works are Jawaharlal Nehru's 'A Tryst with Destiny' and Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream'. Elocution introduces children to some of the greatest thoughts of the world's most influential men and women, and any child who is familiar with these will never be alone. Participating in a **debate** hones a child's analytical skills and increases their confidence in public speaking. *A crucial aspect of debating is listening to what the other person is saying, and respecting their right to an opinion different from your own.* These two qualities are very rare in today's world which is all the more reason for students to learn about these in schools. During a debate students will have to respond to questions raised by the audience. He/she will have to reply cogently, and without getting angry, defensive, aggressive or rude. They cannot shout during a debate and nor can they interrupt or pass personal remarks. **Extempore** speaking may be a bit difficult for students in the beginning as they have to speak immediately after receiving the topic. It is likely that many will be speechless at first but the Teacher can use simple topics like "Pretend you are a commentator at a cricket match between India and Australia. Shane Warne is bowling to Sachin Tendulkar. Speak for one minute on: what happens?" This will not only arouse interest but the Teacher will probably have all the students vying to participate. As students get used to extempore speaking the Teacher can move to more complex topics which will challenge a child's imagination and provoke them to use a wider vocabulary.

A similar game has been included in the YUVA SLP to encourage children to read, by **telling a story**. Here, the first student says the first few lines of any story. It can be as outlandish and imaginative as possible, the only rule is that it must be original. The first student stops in the middle of a sentence and the next student continues the story, and so on. The development of the **library** and the sheer love of **reading** are some of the most important aims of the YUVA SLP. During the launch of Kitabi Magic, we learnt from the students that they wanted all the famous books and comics that they saw in shops, and that they wanted them in both English and Hindi. The Harry Potter books topped their list, perhaps because these are quite expensive and very few students could afford to buy them. The Kitabi Magic initiative helped us to put together a list of books and to design a good library. We learnt for example that instead of having a separate Primary section it was better to arrange all these books on all the lower shelves, with comfortable low seating on carpets, stools and cushions, in front of the shelves, in addition to the table and chairs. YUVA SLP also promotes Classroom Libraries where every student gets a book and a comic which they take home to read and share with the family. This is brought to class once a week, and exchanged with another book or comic. The YUVA SLP also encourages **Teachers' Circulating Library** comprising of books contributed by the Teachers themselves, and a host of activities such as **story writing and poem writing** which shall be included in the YUVA Talent Search. Other games and activities that can be played to promote language skills are Scrabble, Just a Minute, and Dumb Charades.

Module Three – YUVA For All

When we were going through all the sessions, we felt that there were a few which were much too important to be covered in just one class. These were sessions where the activities, when done repeatedly, would hopefully turn into *habits* and this is how Module Three, **YUVA FOR ALL** came about. All the 13 sessions in this Module are to be conducted every year for all classes. The first three sessions continue the themes of being positive, making the right choices, and the importance of values and principles from Module One, but here they are in the shape of classroom activities for children. During field

trials it was quite clear that students did not want to be lectured and therefore YUVA is all about role-plays, mimes, discussions, quizzes, and other interesting activities. But we have also employed a novel *approach* in our treatment of these issues by depicting children as the beneficiaries of the actions of i) a positive person, ii) of a person who made the right choices, and iii) of a person who has values and principles, so that they can better understand these.

We have therefore used a role play where students of DGS collect money for flood relief in Bihar. Being from disadvantaged backgrounds themselves, there is a lot of loose change and rupees in small denominations. Two students, members of the Bal Bhagidari, go to a bank to convert this. On their return to school they realize that the wallet with all the money in it is missing! They are devastated! How will they send money for the flood victims now? But the question uppermost in their tender minds is: will everyone think they stole the money? Will anyone believe that they lost it? They are distressed and quite traumatized. At that time, the driver of the autorickshaw they had travelled in comes to the school. He has come to return the wallet the boys had left behind in his auto. Although a very poor man himself the driver was honest. He could understand what the boys would be going through and he had come to return the wallet. **The boys, and through them the class, come to truly understand the meaning of honesty and integrity, of what it means when a person has values and principles and the impact that such a person has on the lives of others, including perfect strangers! At the same time they are learning valuable lessons on compassion and empathy (helping others in need) and how even the smallest person can make a difference.**

Similarly the session on making the right choices has students enacting two role plays - one group portrays 'negative' Teachers of the kind in the film *Taare Zameen Par*, and indeed, like Shikha in the first session of Module One. The second group depicts 'positive' Teachers like Ram Shankar Nikhumb in the same film, and Sunaina and the reformed Mohan from Module One. The students are then asked: which Teacher do you prefer? The answer is *always* the second Teacher, but then the students are encouraged to explore what it is that makes two otherwise similar people so different? Both are Teachers in the same school, both teach the same students and have the same facilities and resources. What makes one Teacher indulge in corporal punishment while another doesn't? The students are led towards appreciating the power of choice – the Teachers here "chose" their behavior, their actions and indeed their entire approach to Teaching. The second group of Teachers "chose" to be positive, kind, caring and nurturing, and it is the students who benefit when Teachers make the right choices. **So just as the students would like everyone in their lives to make the right choices, the students too should always make the right choices - to be positive, uphold the highest values and principles, do their best always, and be kind and compassionate towards others. Students are also learning valuable lessons that it is not necessary to take recourse to harsh words, anger or violence, and that a positive, constructive approach works well and delivers better results.**

While conducting field trails with students we were disturbed when quite a few of them candidly stated that the most common way to succeed in India, the only way to become wealthy, was by following unfair means. It is very sad when this is the message some of our children are getting. From our interactions with students it became clear that we would need to provide them specific role models. Fortunately for us, we chanced upon an article by Vir Sanghvi where he wrote about the honesty of the Tata Group and its Chairman Ratan Tata. We have included this article as well as items on E. Sreedharan, Narayan Murthy and Nandan Nilekani. All of them are hugely successful. Significantly, they openly speak about how they follow ethical practices and their employees and people who know them vouch for this. The inclusion of these role models has had an enormous impact on students and they actively participate in the discussions, suggesting other similar role models like APJ Abdul Kalam. Although YUVA has featured only a few, there are of course many other such eminent people in India.

One of the most popular sessions during the field trails was one where students appreciate each other by writing positive things on a piece of paper which is then given to the students concerned. Amongst others, Mother Teresa has also pointed out that the biggest hunger of all is the hunger for appreciation and we in YUVA clearly saw this everywhere. This activity is meant to be conducted at least once every year but more importantly it links to other activities like Jadoo Ki Jhappi and over time, we have noticed that giving appreciation becomes a habit. Everyone has some positive points and this session provokes us into searching for these. **Significantly, it helps the student to create a "bank deposit of positive feelings" about themselves which is invaluable in times of uncertainties or depression.**

While laughter therapy, sports and most activities promoting joyful learning stimulate students, it is frequently necessary to give them the skills on how to become calm, and remain tranquil, particularly when they are over excited over some issue, or stressed about exams. We noticed for instance that our students were losing valuable marks in exams because they were making too many careless mistakes which in turn was largely due to the fact that they were anxious and agitated. YUVA For All therefore has a session where children are taught a very easy way to **meditate**, and become calm. This activity can be done anywhere and students are encouraged to do it at home also. Importantly, it helps them to understand that a calm mind thinks better than an agitated one, and this learning is invaluable in future sessions on how to handle emergencies where presence of mind and clear thinking can make the difference between life and death.

In fact the very next session is about handling a bomb threat and all crisis situations. The fact is that we can never anticipate all the emergencies that will suddenly arise. In the last few years schools have had to contend with many threatening situations such as bomb threat hoax calls, necessitating evacuation of the school. In a few very tragic recent cases many children lost their lives in fires, and disaster management has become a prime concern, particularly for Delhi which is in a sensitive seismic zone prone to earthquakes. **Schools need to handle health emergencies, natural and man made disasters, and now possible terror threats. None of us can anticipate what will happen tomorrow.** During the Batla House encounter in 2008, thousands of students of 6 DGS in the area were either giving exams, or were on the narrow roads going home at the end of the morning shift school, or walking to school to attend the afternoon shift school when the firing started. In another instance, one of our Standard XII students Nagendra Singh was at the site of the Sarojini Nagar bomb blasts in October 2005 and this brave young lad helped to save the lives of many people for which he was felicitated by the Police. When we asked him how he was able to accomplish this he explained that it was due to the training he had received in his school. **Since children are vulnerable everywhere – at home, in the market place, in school or even on the roads – it is best that they have some skills on what they should do. The YUVA SLP therefore has sessions in Modules Three and Four which focus on "being prepared to handle all emergencies".** They cover issues of evacuating a school, how to be alert, and encourage students to memorise some crucial telephone numbers such as that of the nearest hospital. They include role plays where children enact an emergency and other students are encouraged to suggest what the correct response should be. Issues of first aid and the contents of a first aid box, handling bleeding, and how to tie bandages are also covered. The Department is tying up with the Police, Home Guards, Fire Department and Red Cross to help in imparting these sessions to Teachers and to students. An insightful article from TIME Magazine on the value of carrying out mock drills and always being prepared, has been incorporated in YUVA For All. Learning from that we have started drills in all schools and we realised that there were many problems which had to be resolved, for example, unconfirmed reports suggest that the death rate in the fire in a school in Kumbakonam was largely due to the fact that the Teachers panicked, and asked the younger children to remain where they were, in the class. The issue we faced was that in a school with 4,000 students, how would the primary

section Teachers evacuate a class of frightened five year olds? The solution we come up with was both novel and very workable – during the evacuation drill, instead of leaving the school building directly, the students of Standard XII will go straight to the Standard I class and help the children. The students of Standard XI will help those in Standard II, and so on, so that all the primary section children are covered. This would of course be in addition to the *immediate* steps that the primary section Teachers will need to take, but in our experience getting such small children out of the building is just the first step. They need to be constantly reassured, their Parents contacted, and the children *safely* handed over to the right Parents. Carrying out regular drills will help the children of both classes bond with each other so that in case of an actual emergency the young children are not frightened at the sight of so many older students suddenly appearing at a time when they are already scared. In due course, we propose with our partner agencies to introduce the specific responses to specific situations e.g. earthquake, road accident, terror threat, fires, medical emergency. We also hope to be able to *involve Parents in an annual drill* so they also learn about their own appropriate responses – how to contact their child, why they should not panic – in addition to familiarizing themselves with how the school will respond towards their child. **At the end of the day all we can do is to be as prepared as possible and that is what the YUVA SLP aims to do.** As mentioned earlier, the session on mediation teaches children on how to be calm in the face of a stressful situation, and helps them to maintain presence of mind during emergencies also.

In the face of the alarming number of avoidable accidents and deaths on the road, it was considered advisable to have a session on **road safety**. Students consider a true life incident where a young boy loses his father due to a speeding car, and they enact role plays where some pretend to be cars and buses busily driving bumper to bumper, while others pretend to be pedestrians. The former are typical urban traffic, determined not to slow down, while the latter have to cross the road. What should the correct responses be? What can the drivers of cars and buses learn from this? Students also enact the roles of drivers with seat belts and motorists with helmets, and also those who are not using these safety devices. Both groups have a head on collision. What happens, who survives and why is what the students will need to introspect about, as they learn all about the steps necessary to ensure safety on the roads for everyone.

Delhi is going to be the proud host of the next Commonwealth Games in 2010 and we saw in it an opportunity to reinforce politeness and courtesy, to remind our students to say Please Thank you and Sorry (PTS) and most critically to improve their conversation skills in English. During Bhagidari workshops with Parents and students the number one item on their list of wanted things in Delhi Government Schools was education in the English medium and fluency in speaking English. The Department has entered into an agreement with the British Council under which they are professionally developing the skills of our English Language Teachers and the results of the initiative so far are very impressive. The session in Module Three has role plays for students on what they may encounter during the Games such as welcoming foreign guests to Delhi, assisting them in how to reach various places, and it also encourages them to speak in English. The session also introduces them to all the member countries of the Commonwealth and all DGS students will be preparing projects on, and learning more about these member states and countries.

There is also a session on **rights of the child** for our students in Module Three which should be read with the one for Teachers and Parents in Module One. The session aims to sensitise students towards the rights of all children and we hope that not only will the students be able to assert their own rights but also that of other children presently being denied even the most basic rights such as child labourers. We hope our students will help to wipe out any child domestic labour in their own homes at least, to start with.

One of the most important areas of YUVA is all issues pertaining to the environment from global warming and other climate changes to extinction of species and conservation of vital natural resources. There are four

sessions in Module Three which should be read with the session on Eco Clubs in Module Two, and these are also linked to eight other sessions in Module Four which can be perused by checking the contents under Domain V – Cleanliness and Environment. Those in Module Three are about simple CAN DO activities which everyone can follow to make an impact. Thus the session on water conservation focuses on collection of rain water, using less water by using small glass fuls for brushing teeth and even how to put a brick in toilet cisterns so that less water is used while flushing without affecting the efficiency of the flush. Combined with sessions on out-of-the-box thinking our students have suggested amongst others, that the manufacture of bath tubs be banned. They also appear to be considering ways to desalinate sea water so that it can be made potable. The CAN DO activities to reduce pollution and conserve power are suggested. In the session on waste, students are encouraged to reduce their house hold waste to zero by following a few simple steps – (i) segregate garbage, (ii) convert the biodegradable garbage to compost (at home in a house or a flat), (iii) give useful things you don't need such as books, newspapers, utensils and clothes to an NGO or any organization which can use them for the underprivileged, to make bags etc. and (iv) give away the rest such as bottles and cardboard boxes to the local 'kabariwala'. That would leave hazardous waste such as old medicines, left over paint, and e-waste. We weren't quite sure what we could suggest should be done with these but a meeting with the Department of Environment soon found a solution. What we are now going to do is: (v) put large boxes (red coloured) in every school and every child can bring the hazardous waste from home, and put it into the red box (older children can help out the younger ones). The Environment Department will have the contents picked up and safely disposed of. It should be possible through these five steps for all students to reduce the waste at home to zero. Children will actually carry out most of these activities in school so it will be easy for them to repeat it at home. We hope that by doing these every year they will soon become habits and students will soon, unconsciously and perhaps without realizing it, carry out these activities throughout adult life.

Module Four – Classroom sessions

There are sessions to be conducted with students in Standards VI to XII with an average of 12 sessions every year. These have been grouped into basic thematic areas which we call Domains. The first Domain is all about making existing classroom learning **Joyful** and is contained in Module Two.

The second Domain is on **Applied Life Skills and Life Skills Stories** and as the name suggests, attempts to both introduce Life Skills to students and reinforce how all of use can learn from simple, much loved stories. The difference between these stories under YUVA and in a textbook is in the purpose and approach – under YUVA we have tried to bring out the very essence, the feelings and learnings behind the stories. Thus the race between the hare and the tortoise is a story about perseverance and determination to achieve a goal, rather than a text about language and comprehension. Similarly, the story of the mouse and the lion is about how even the smallest, supposedly most insignificant persons can make a hugely positive difference. It is also about the strength that comes when people unitedly work together towards a common goal. Plus Minus Interesting (PMI) games which encourage students to think out-of-the-box, are also included here and these are crucial in not only provoking children to think laterally but also encourages them to never lose their childish curiosity, their never ending questions on 'why not'? as well as their spontaneity, for it is such thinking that has been behind all inventions and most solutions to vexing problems. Popular sessions challenge students to consider what they would do if they were the Chief Minister of Delhi or even the Prime Minister of India.

The third Domain is on issues regarding **Academics and Exams** and incorporates a host of activities and

suggestions which will help students to tackle their exams with more confidence and obtain more marks without any additional stress or pressure.

The fourth Domain deals with the **Management of Stress and Bullying**. Recent cases of extreme aggression by students have worried Parents and authorities and we felt it essential to include this area under YUVA. The sessions contain workable tips on how to handle a case of bullying. They also counsel students on how to avoid anger, to manage change (which is inevitable) and how to convert negative feelings into positive ones.

Cleanliness and Environment issues have been taken up under the fifth Domain, and as indicated earlier these are scattered throughout the YUVA Modules. The sessions include specific activities and the students will learn through demonstrations. For instance, they are asked to bring some biodegradable garbage from home such as vegetable and fruit peels. This is put into an earthenware pot in the classroom, earthworms are introduced, and in a few weeks the children will visibly see for themselves how compost is made. They are not likely to ever forget such experiences and will have the confidence to try them out where ever they may be. In another session, the children develop their own classroom garden by making plants and keeping and maintaining them in the classroom. They also learn to make water containers for birds and to put a little food out everyday for birds and squirrels. We would dearly like our children to empathise with and show compassion towards animals. I recall hearing somewhere that each deliberate, man made extinction of a species hurtles mankind itself closer towards its own ultimate extinction. While preparing the sessions on the environment all of us were dismayed at what people all over the world were doing to the planet, to its creatures and to mother nature. The wanton destruction and the very planned, deliberate annihilation of the earth's resources point towards the gravest threat that all of us are facing today. It is only the most fool hardy who will destroy their own home, the only home they have, and it appears that mankind is determined to get that distinction. We are confident that our children will not be as cavalier with their home as we have been with their legacy. The YUVA sessions are critical for children to learn what they CAN DO. The Fact Sheet with the Eco-Club session in Module Two is alarming and a must read. It sets the tone for all the other sessions in this Domain.

Cleanliness is a top priority under YUVA and the sessions have a very interesting activity which drives home the point that while everyone complains that others (usually the government) "don't do anything" to clean up the mess in public areas, the fact is that most of us don't even do our own bit to help. The sessions start with children being introduced to how and why they can keep their home clean, and builds up to keeping their school, and then their community clean. Boys are encouraged not to urinate or spit in public, and to take pride in having a clean and beautiful city. The sessions are linked to the Commonwealth Games 2010 and the children reminded that as good hosts they must do their bit to keep their city clean.

The sixth Domain is about **Choosing a Career** and primarily dwells on the fact that students can chase their dreams, and that there is no need to panic as there are many jobs to choose from. We noticed that a major source of tension for students in the senior classes is what job they will take up, or more seriously, whether a job will even be available to them or not. Many come under pressure from Parents to join occupations that were popular when *they* were growing up. These sessions have activities to help students understand their aptitude, and to achieve their dreams.

The seventh Domain is all about **Interpersonal Relationships, Communication and Decision Making** and seeks to help our students to overcome major problems that crop up in life due to poor interpersonal skills and relationships, and also to acquire the skill to take decisions. This Domain includes three very instructive sessions on the topic of children with special needs and sensitizes students towards the issue of inclusive education. They play a few interesting games

like being blindfolded, so that they can empathise with their friends.

The eighth Domain is **Nutrition** and it handles areas like under or malnutrition, and over nutrition (obesity). It does not restrict itself to imaginatively conveying the components of a balanced diet but also ventures into the area of school gardening. Thus, every student under YUVA will cultivate one vegetable every year in the school compound, both in the ground and in a pot. They will be given seedlings in the school and encouraged to grow the vegetable at home. We consciously decided to include cultivation in simple pots and boxes as many of our children live in unplanned colonies or slums where there is no free land. Since the selected vegetables are basically creepers they can be cultivated in a small container and trained to creep up the walls of the student's home, providing an instant source of good nutrition for the entire family. Innovative recipes with interesting names have been 'invented'. As Parents we felt that children weren't interested in 'lauki ki sabzi' but that having 'Kapil da Kamaal' for lunch wasn't so bad after all! Every student under YUVA will also cook a nutritious recipe, including boys. It was major task for us to install kitchens/Home Science labs in all the boys' schools but we finally managed it under the VKS. All the sessions in this Domain complement each other perfectly and give a very holistic perspective to children on nutrition.

The ninth Domain is on **Health, Hygiene and First Aid**. The sessions on First Aid should be read along with sessions on how to handle a bomb threat and on road safety in Module One. They teach children about the very basics of first aid and what to do for example, if children are alone at home and their elderly grandfather has an accident. It reinforces the need to always wash hands properly and to maintain personal hygiene. Important steps on avoiding diseases such as malaria are covered, and the need for overall well being, where health is not just physical health but mental and social health also too.

The tenth and last domain is on over arching one called **Doing the Right Thing** and is linked to being positive and making the right choices. **This domain is the very heart of YUVA and it lays the foundation for the other Domains. What does it cover? Well, honesty, integrity, values and principles to start with, going on to ethical behavior and practices, kindness, compassion, empathy, respect, care, happiness, dignity, hope, faith, charity, character, and responsibilities. In addition to sessions in Module One which have already been dealt with, it introduces children to role plays and activities on why they shouldn't lie or steal, and why and how they can be polite, courteous and respectful towards their Teachers and Parents. It deals with issues of how they can choose to be happy and positive – always 'flying high the kite of hope!** It has one of the most critical sessions in YUVA: on female foeticide. This is a rather hard hitting session but we felt that it was essential that Standard XII students, future parents, understood the full implications of this barbaric act. It includes a role play where students excitedly go in a time machine to visit Delhi 50 years from now. They hope to see a beautiful, developed city that is green and clean. Instead, they see a dark, dull, grey city. There are no girls or women, only men, - men who stare at the girls in the group and start following them. The students go inside a mall and all they see are rows upon rows of men's clothing – all grey. There are no sari shops or brightly coloured women's dresses anywhere. There are no cosmetics, or women or children here. The men are still following them. By now the students are frightened. A kindly old man sees their plight and helps them into a near dark room. The students want to know whatever happened? The old man replies that ever since "The Great Elimination of Girls" started around 50 years ago in the year 2000 AD, the number of women and girls had dwindled rapidly. The family unit had broken down and most people felt that there would be a conflict soon over women. The students are really scared by now and they rush back to their time machine and to the Delhi of today. They are relieved but deeply concerned: is this the future of their city? The role play deliberately depicts a worst case scenario which may become a reality if all of us don't collectively stop this terrible practice.

In another role play, students enact Parents who have just undergone female foeticide. Anecdotal evidence from NGOs uniformly suggests that after the foeticide, the foetus is always shown to the family so that they can "reassure" themselves that it actually was a girl. In the role play the students are handed over the "Foetus" (a doll). They see it moving, struggling to live and they feel its pain. Then it dies. The "Parents" are shattered. What have they done? We at YUVA strongly felt that students must be moved by this session – moved enough to motivate family members against female foeticide and to *never* commit it themselves. The session ends with the students taking a vow not to commit, or allow, female foeticide.

The impact and benefits of the YUVA initiative are there for everyone to see. They are tangible and visible, in the indicators and data, in the buildings and in the attitudes. Our school in the President's Estate has undergone an incredible transformation and it is now one of our finest – a clean, bright and cheerful building with committed Teachers and Principal, bustling with laughter and activities, and with excellent results too. Under "Pahel" we have added another feather to our cap as we provide job based training to some students who have passed out of Standard XII, and high quality special training to other students who want to compete in entrance exams to medical, engineering and even fashion designing professional courses. The work of ensuring quality education is a never ending one and we are constantly adding new schemes and programmes to the YUVA portfolio.

Our goal under YUVA has been to teach and help children, Parents and Teachers to *be prepared*. No one can really ever know what totally unexpected challenge or emergency will suddenly arise. Some time ago there was a huge outcry against the misuse of mobile phones which were filming or taking embarrassing photos of girls, and there was a demand that schools must teach girls about these dangers as well as teach boys not to do such things. After that, instances of aggression by students were a cause of worry with not just bullying but shootouts and knife stabbing suddenly emerging in schools. The need to teach children how to deal with anger and aggression, and how they must not resort to violence, was raised. Recent terrorist attacks have led to bomb hoax calls in schools and combined with a general fear of the unexpected, the need to give some training to children so they are better able to respond to handle emergencies was felt. Tragic fire incidents in schools in which hundreds of students lost their lives have led to the unanimous feeling that we have to conduct mock drills in our schools and equip students with the skills to cope in all cases of disaster, be they man made, accidental or natural. Recent instances of physical corporal punishment all over the country, some of such shocking proportions that the children lost their lives, have made it essential to reach out to Teachers, to train them and even counsel them where required. Sporadic cases of physical molestation of students still surface from time to time and verbal abuse appears to be prevalent in many schools across the country. We in Delhi's Department of Education are proud that we have heard these voices of concern and have developed what we hope is a response - the YUVA School Life Skills Programme. It teaches Teachers and students valuable lessons on being prepared and how to handle all types of situations that they may face.

The YUVA SLP also seeks to help Parents, Teachers and Students to become "discerning" individuals, who will be able to make the right choices in all situations. For example, while preparing the sessions we had a fairly large member of sessions on the issue of the influence of the media, particularly films and advertisements. But somewhere along the line we felt that we were missing the wood for the trees. The issue really wasn't so much about iconic film stars endorsing unhealthy aerated drinks or fairness creams. The issue really wasn't so much about children feeling the pressure to have

a zero size figure or 6 pack abs. Instead, the main issue seemed more about the students' responses to these. Many of them were totally taken in by these but many it appeared were not. The latter group displayed remarkable maturity and depth of understanding – they could 'discern' when an endorsement was being promoted just for monetary gains. They were able to take all the "negative" and "harmful" messages being received and **they were able to take these, sift out the best, and ignore the rest.** It was from these extraordinary children that we learnt that our mission was actually to teach all children the skills to be able to 'discern' – to enjoy watching someone popular dance about on your TV screen, or the 'perfect mother' and 'perfect housewife' with 'perfect children' and 'perfect' home happily telling you that if you buy product xyz then your life will be equally 'perfect'- to enjoy all this, and yet not go rushing out to buy the product, not at least until they've read the fine print, investigated the advantages of the product, scrutinized the harmful substances and additives it may have, checked the prices and features with other similar products on the market, assured themselves on the after sales service and asked themselves the question- is it really good for me? So we turned to Life Skills Education – the skills of Self Awareness and Coping with Stress (it doesn't matter if I am dark, or plump – I am still worthy of being loved and my favourite film star should have known that), the skills of Critical Thinking and Decision Making (I've read and heard that aerated drinks are harmful and not good for me. So let me enjoy the commercial with my favourite cricketer, and let him drink the aerated drink). The advantage with this approach is that by and large we can move our focus away from all media, and towards giving Life Skills Education to students. It also equips students with the skills to appreciate and be influenced by positive role models and messages in the media. For example, recent advertisements asking everyone to vote, those showing adult daughters taking care of their Parents, and those featuring men who do household chores and fathers who take up vital responsibilities concerning the care of their children, are very welcome, and there is much to be proud about in our free media.

Life Skills Education can thus help our Teachers, Parents and students to take the right decisions in all situations, irrespective of whether there is a session on it in the YUVA SLP or not!

The entire YUVA initiative is based on the premise that everyone is equal, and it therefore is an ideal tool to promote **Human Rights**. It seeks to empower students to be positive agents of change, influencing the actions of their family, the school and even the community.

YUVA Skills and Life Skills however have to be constantly used and practiced, this will help convert them into habits and a 'habitual way of thinking' that will over time become unconscious behaviour on our part. However the fact is that no matter how positive we are, or the fact that we've made the right choice and done our best, things can still go wrong and people will let us down. In spite of our enormous emphasis on positivity and motivation, we could not lose sight of the fact that **discipline** had to go hand in hand with all our initiatives, and that whenever any Teacher crossed the line, punishment had to be considered. As a rule, we do not punish any Teacher or Principal except on the most severe grounds such as molestation where we have a zero tolerance policy. Elsewhere we make it clear that we will not hesitate to be tough, but all we expect from them is that they do their best, and we give them all the resources they need to do this.

Before concluding, I would like to extend a personal thank you to a few people starting with the Teachers and Principals in my own schools especially Father Moore and Father Keogh at St. Xavier's, Bokaro. Wherever I was uncertain of what to do, I wondered what they would have done, and the answer then appeared, crystal clear. To three very brilliant and dynamic young men who I had the privilege of working with – the Directors of Education Vijay Kumar, Sandeep Kumar and Chandra Bhushan Kumar. To the former Chief Secretary Shri R.Reghunathan for selecting me for the post and his unstinting, unswerving support which has made all the difference. To Shri P.K. Tripathi, Principal Secretary to the CM who has mentored and guided all of us, helping us to resolve what looked like insurmountable problems. It was

his constant presence by our side and his motivation that has made all these achievements possible. To the Minister Education Shri Arvinder Singh who worked with all of us as part of a team and who reached out to everyone, including the officials, Teachers and students. All he has ever wanted is for the system to provide high quality education befitting the capital of the country and he has in fact led the team. To the Chief Minister Smt. Shiela Dikshit who has inspired everyone and who has stood by us like a rock. It was she who suggested that we start a Life Skills Programme and she has constantly given us valuable inputs particularly on civic and environmental issues. The trust and faith she reposed in us made all of us *want* to work even harder, and it gave us the confidence to deliver. She has been the best role model for us, for which we thank her very much. And of course, a *very big* thank you to our amazing officers, Teachers, Principals and students, all part of Team YUVA. I have learnt so much from them and am really proud to be part of *their* Team!

Although we are immensely proud of our achievements we are aware of the huge amount of work which still needs to be done to provide all children in Delhi access to education that makes them happy, healthy, productive and responsible members of civil society. We have learnt under YUVA to have hope and trust, and to have faith – faith in ourselves, in others, and faith that there is a meaning and purpose in all that we do. I would like to conclude with a few lines from the YUVA Theme Song – "Mann YUVA" - written, composed and sung by Palash Sen and the rock band EUPHORIA. This foot tapping hugely popular song has words which have struck a chord with all our students. All that children really need are our love, support and good education, and with this they can change the world, making it a better place. They are our future, and they carry with them *our* hopes and aspirations. It is remarkable how EUPHORIA have captured these feelings so beautifully in their song:

*Ek pal mein prashn kitne
Poochta hain Mann YUVA
Dil hi dil mein sapne kitne
Dekhta hai yeh Mann YUVA.*

*Kitni khushia, kitne sapne
Kitne aasha hai Mann YUVA
Nasamajh hai phir bhi samjhe
Baat saari yeh Mann YUVA
Soch le jo, to badal de, duniya saari
Yeh Mann YUVA*

Secretary (Education, Sports and Culture)
Government of National Capital Territory
of Delhi
Concept and Team Leader,
YUVA SLP