

INTRODUCTION

Secretary, Department of Education, and
Team Leader,
YUVA School Life skills Programme

"Is anyone listening?"

At first glance this appears to be a line from a science fiction story or film, a voice crackling over the air waves, searching for someone or something. But for us it was the voices we heard so many times from people deeply distressed and concerned about a host of issues pertaining to children. These ranged from shock at violence in schools both by and against students, anguish at the low quality of education which was encouraging children either not to join or drop out of school, to worry about a world with so much aggression and antagonism, and concern at what is happening to our planet and our children's inheritance.

"Is anyone listening? Does anyone care?"

I would like to answer a resounding **"YES! WE CARE"** The YUVA School Life skills Programme (SLP) is a response to the voices of concern from parents, teachers, the media, and all arms of civil society. **It is a specific and coherent plan of action to help children (and adults too!) become happy, healthy, responsible, and productive citizens** and covers a very large spectrum of themes such as promoting positive values, civic and social awareness, nutrition, health and hygiene and a separate module for teachers and parents.

What makes the YUVA SLP stand out is that it has *already been trialled with over 40,000 teachers and Principals, with remarkable results*. Our vision of viewing the teacher as the most crucial pivot of the educational system has borne rich dividends. The teachers are now the very purpose and rationale of the YUVA SLP, its entire focus is on developing *their* skills, building *their* self-esteem and self-respect, helping *them* to cope with problems etc. As the Secretary of the Department I cannot hope to directly touch the million plus students in our schools, but I can reach out to 40,000 teachers and Principals and hone their skills, in the belief that once they are valued, they too shall value their students.

A series of Capacity Building Programmes were held where senior officials and I personally addressed, interacted with, and motivated around 40,000 teachers and Principals, applying the YUVA Life Skills contained in the draft material here. The sessions included *listening* to the teachers, answering queries, and *responding* to their concerns be it regarding safety, promotions, or transfers. Many sessions ended with some "Jadoo ki Jhappis!" (a warm appreciative hug).

And our teachers and Principals did not let us down, rising magnificently to the occasion. They applied the YUVA Life Skills and the results are there for everyone to see. **In a development which is perhaps unprecedented, the results of the Standard**

X Board Exams for our schools, conducted by the CBSE, rose by almost 36% in just three years! (from a low of 48% in 2005, to 84% in 2008) . This was accomplished with the highest number of children actually appearing for the exam. The quality of the results has also improved dramatically and the Department has a number of schools which are amongst the best.

The efficacy of the training programmes can be gauged by the fact that it was during one of the interactive sessions that a Maths teacher pointed out to me that while students needed a geometry box just to attempt around 25 marks worth of questions in the Standard X CBSE Maths paper, our students invariably either did not have a geometry box and/ or were not aware of how to use it. I can still recall that cold day in December 2005 when I heard this, and how I felt even colder at the thought that our students had, in all likelihood, been appearing for only 75% of a Maths paper. I immediately issued directions that all Principals should purchase geometry boxes and that Maths teachers should teach the students how to use it. The pass percentage for the CBSE Exams that were held two months later in March 2006, rose from 48% in the previous year, to 59.73%, a huge increase of almost 12%. **The Government subsequently took a decision to supply free geometry boxes to all students from Standard VIII.**

In fact, many sessions and activities mentioned in this material are already underway in our schools and these have led to a radical transformation in all areas be it results, infrastructure, increase in enrolment, reduction in the drop out levels and improvement in the quality of education. However there is still a lot to be done and the YUVA SLP has to realize its full potential. I would like to thank the thousands of people who have helped to refine the YUVA SLP, and all those who have supported us, particularly the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

My belief that a valued teacher and Principal can work wonders has not been belied. This YUVA SLP is dedicated to the lakhs of students, teachers, Principals and officials of our Department of Education and those elsewhere.