

Suggestion

In most discussions and conferences, we seem to criticize many aspects, except what I believe to be a main cause of a lot of the mess in the modern world: the logic which lies (as a dangerous virus) underneath the surface and which determines much of our actions, conceptions, perceptions, and the ways we interact and relate to one another and to our surroundings. Logic, as I use it here, refers to the governing values/ principles/ convictions and to the dominant meanings and measures.

I will use the analogy with breathing to clarify why I consider logic to be more fundamental than learning, in our attempts to co-create learning communities. Breathing (like learning) takes place all the time. If the air is polluted, no matter how much we improve and change our ways of breathing, we will continue to breathe in the pollution. Similarly, no matter how much we change our ways of learning, if the dominant polluted logic remains hidden, we will continue to be polluted by it, and it will eventually seep into our thoughts, actions and expressions.

I hope that, before we leave, those who are interested in this issue will have the opportunity to discuss it and make it visible. In particular: what are the values of the dominant logic? What are the values that we (who are meeting here) seem to work in harmony with?

- Munir Fasheh



Image by Anita Borkar

open space sessions

Over the five days of the conference, participants attempted in many ways to actually 'live' a learning society. One of the techniques used during our time together was Open Space Technology (OST). This — which, contrary to its name, uses no conventional technology at all — is a simple way to invite more people into conversations about crucial issues, questions, concerns and possibilities. The responsibility and accountability for what happens belong to participants themselves, rather than to organizers or facilitators (as is the case in most conferences).

How does OST work? Each participant is invited to post the topics/ questions/ experiments/ etc. they are interested in, with an indication for when and where they want to meet to discuss this topic. Postings are placed on a large wall for all conference attendees to see. In this way, the 'agenda' is created by participants themselves, according to their interests and concerns. The rest of the process — in which people host or attend conversations — operates according to the Law of Two Feet: asking each participant to use their two feet to go where they feel they are learning and contributing the most. This self-regulating process respects the diversity of peoples' learning and allows multiple conversations to happen at once. Four simple principles make what might seem like a state of chaos actually work very well: 1) Whoever comes are the right people; 2) Whatever happens is the only thing that could have; 3) Whenever it starts is the right time; and 4) When it's over, it's over. These ideas simply explain how a person's interests are what motivate her to commit to certain ideas/practices, and are ultimately what drive the completion of any work.

When OST was introduced, a few participants raised the concern that it was an "American imposition". There was also the comment that the process being described is a very natural way of interacting, which is commonplace in traditional communities in South Asia, and therefore does not require such a rigid framework. These concerns were further elaborated in smaller group conversations; and ultimately, it was felt that people would post topics/questions of interest, and only an extremely loose timing structure would be applied. The four principles and Law of Two Feet were deemed unnecessary to mention, as people were naturally moving and organizing as they saw fit.

How can we make our own learning opportunities?

How to generate creative expressions beyond writing and performing arts?

What does it mean to be a "citizen" in today's world? What does it mean to be political?

How can we incorporate living traditions and local knowledges into children's learning processes?

How to make 'unlearning' possible?

"Why do we give more importance to answers over questions?"

- Vidhi Jain

some of the issues/ideas/experiences/feelings/
processes/experiments/actions discussed
over the four days of the conference

learning in theater workshop
music (vocal and instrumental)

change
and
identity

sensitizing senses, breaking habits

redefining notions and practices of 'waste'
(video presentation)

media literacy: from consumers to
critical thinkers and creators

alternatives to TV

we will tell our life stories

social tools for e-swaraj; discussions
on humanizing technologies

FAMILY MATTERS:

SIDH'S STUDY OF THE JOINT FAMILY

In July 2002, Sanshodhan, the research and advocacy wing of the Society for Integrated Development of the Himalayas (SIDH), published a thought-provoking study on the impact of family structure upon children in rural Uttarakhand. "Child and the Family" challenges the dominant view regarding the superiority of nuclear families over joint families. It finds that the joint family structure is better suited for an agrarian economy. It also suggests that one of the causes for rural impoverishment has been the break-up of the joint family into smaller nuclear units. Once split off, nuclear families often left their traditional occupations, moved away from their land, became wage earners, and thus dependent entirely upon the market, became poorer and poorer.

Some of the main conclusions of the study were:

- Children from joint families seemed to be more relaxed, happy, cooperative and less competitive, while children nuclear families seemed more street smart, hypocritical, lonely and insecure.
- While all children worked at home, children from nuclear families seemed to be overworked; children from joint families had more time to play and have fun.
- Children from joint families knew more about traditional medicines, home remedies, cultural practices, festivals, folklore and folksongs. They liked speaking in the local dialect, unlike the children from nuclear families who were embarrassed about their dialect and traditions.
- Women, children, the elderly, ill and disabled in joint families get a lot more support than those in nuclear families.
- The work burden on women in joint families is far less, as it is shared; this leaves women more free time, so they can visit their parents and participate in *mela* (fairs) more easily.

Despite the benefits of joint families on collective learning, they are breaking up quickly in rural areas, due to the impacts of modern education, the market/wage economy and urban aspirations. The study encourages the following actions to regenerate joint family structures: 1) conduct additional studies in different parts of rural India on the link between family structures, and people's health; workload; traditional occupations; migration; economic security; etc. If such findings validate this study, then policy level actions should be taken to provide incentives to encourage joint families, at least in rural areas. 2) make changes to textbooks and curriculum which present joint families and traditional communities unfavorably (or show nuclear families and urban lifestyles as superior).

- Anuradhi Joshi, study coordinator
<sidhsri@sancharnet.in>

“certain questions became redundant,
certain new questions emerged,
found some answers
out of which I am waiting
for new questions to emerge”



Image by Sujata Babar

SENSING NATURE THROUGH NATURAL LEARNING PROCESSES

I am conducting a workshop for the children of Aruvacode. It is called 'Sensing Nature', and is basically a continuation of my exploration in sensitizing the senses and initiating creativity. About 40 children are attending the workshop, and five older girls (age 15-16) are guiding the workshop. The idea is to enable the children to observe nature more closely. Village children are already quite good at this; I think I am adding a bit more detail. For example, if they are asked about dry leaves, surely several variations of brown color will come to their mind. Then they will collect about 25 dry leaves and paste them according to light to dark, and then they will also mix and make the color. They can repeat this with green leaves and other things from nature.

This exploration is extension of my work regarding strengthening traditional knowledge systems, where senses are the primary tools creating knowledge. I see holistic knowing as a result of intuition. Intuition is possible only in experiential processes where the whole being is involved. And only in a natural learning process does experience itself become the context for learning. Authentic living is learning. This differs from Modern Education, which has shifted the center of knowledge from Nature to human, from collective to ego, from heart to intellect/mind, from intuition to reason, from experience to information, from holistic to compartmentalized. We must find ways to move out of the modern educational system and the knowledge it propagates, because it will only lead us to our doom. We need to de-intellectualize our present knowledge and start engaging in holistic knowing and intuitive knowledge.

I believe that all art forms are a result of developing one of the senses. Sensing nature means seeing nature,

hearing nature, tasting nature, smelling nature, and touching nature. (What I mean by "nature" is the immediate living environment of the children in the village.) Seeing nature involves exploring colors, lines, shapes, lights and shades. Touching nature means becoming aware of the textural qualities of objects, making a textural scale using various objects, and making the surfaces of different texture using clay. Smelling nature seeks to use a few blindfold games for identifying smells. Hearing nature will entail many sound related games: making whistles made of leaves, rattles, etc. Many children are good at imitating birds, as they are naturally inclined to listen to these sounds.

In the workshop, we also intend to do several other kinds of activities during the workshop, like playing traditional games, making a clay model of the village, making objects out of paper and leaves, telling stories, making poetry, doing theater, introducing medicinal plants, etc.

I see all of these processes as part of natural learning - which builds upon a belief that learning unfolds naturally from within the individual and grows to include social settings, such as family, close friends, community and society in general. Natural learning follows closely the patterns of activity already existing in daily life, building a rich and comprehensive educational experience. Children become intimately involved in all aspects of family life, often including family working life. They are not closeted away from the world of adults, but are welcomed, in 'apprenticeship' roles, and valued greatly for their contributions. Where skills and knowledge are needed, within these rich social contexts, resources are always found.

- KB Jinan <jinankb@vsnl.com>

the theme of constructive learning:
what-why-how

natural learning process

learning is where life is
- I would like to talk about 'silence'
- restlessness-activity, silence-aloneness

gender
and
education

- how our words shape our views of a place; for example, how we label children in rural areas as 'bored' based on urban perceptions of 'fun/entertainment'

*school without walls:
experiment of Rashtra
Seva Dal*

the underlying
logic of the
dominant
system

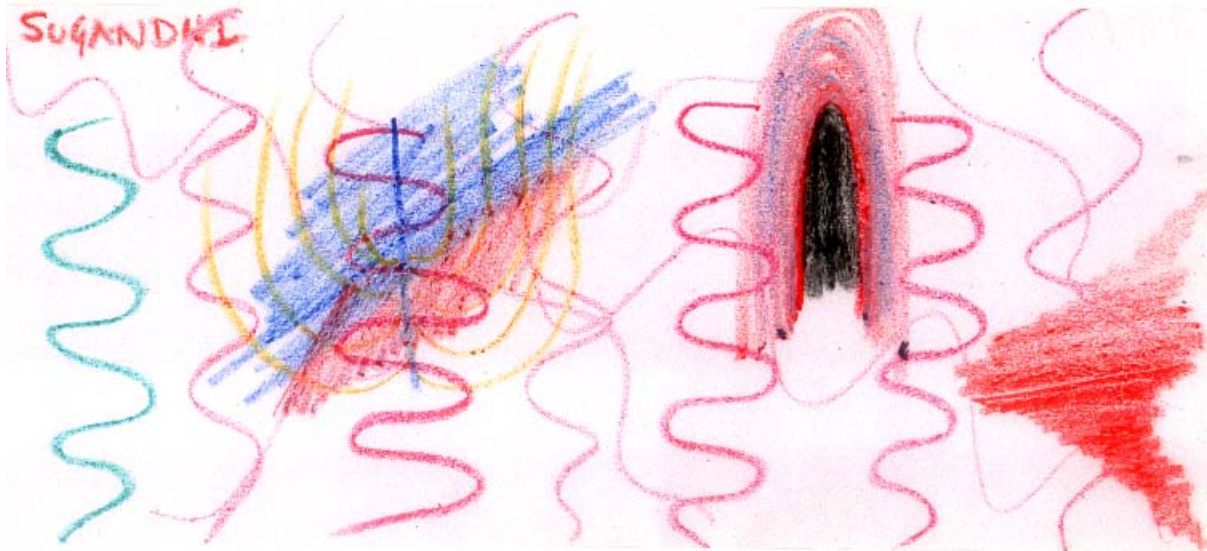


Image by Sugandhi Baliga

*If you shut your door to all errors
truth will be shut out.*

- Rabindranath Tagore

comparative cases of peoples' movements and "development" challenges: India (Asia), Africa, Latin/South/North America, etc.

fundamental needs and learning societies

REFLECTIONS ON KSHAMA (FORGIVENESS)

Re-conceptualizing human rights -- or rather, creating spaces and language for non-institutionalized notions of human dignity -- is vital for conversations on learning societies. I want to share one such notion from Jainism: the value of forgiveness. Once a year, Jains celebrate their greatest Festival: Samvatsari – the festival of forgiveness. After daylong fast and meditation, the Jains give and seek "Kshama" or forgiveness: "Whether with my intentions or no intentions, knowingly or unknowingly, if through my thoughts/ words/deeds I have become the cause of any sadness or suffering or sorrow for you, please forgive me – as I too grant you forgiveness."

When everyone comes from that space of "I'm the one responsible for all the experiences, pleasant or unpleasant; but if I become the cause of any unpleasant experiences, I have to ask you for forgiveness" – it is the pinnacle of humility. So the ritual is that every Jain is to ask everyone for forgiveness. Not only by doing something does wrong happen; but by not doing something also wrong happens..

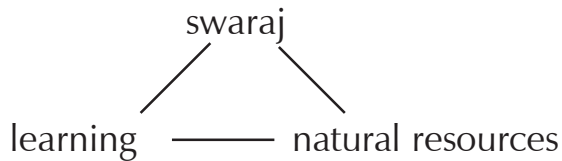
To ask forgiveness from everyone, the mind has to be in a serene, pleasant, humble state. When there is aggression in you, you start justifying yourself and in the process, you stop knowing yourself. When you forgive someone, you start feeling lighter, and all that anger and hatred sublimates. You are freed from that chain of action and reaction. Real virtue lies in forgiving someone even before they ask for forgiveness. When you forgive, it is you who becomes free.

- Raj Sethia <liberateschool@rediffmail.com>

learning from dropouts who innovate, create and break boundaries

child as an inspiration

creativity and innovative thinking



4C's: C-Cricket, C-Communalism, C-Coca-Cola, C-Conflict Resolution

krishak panchayat - rethinking agriculture for harmony with nature and culture

accompanying learning processes with
individuals and in communities

Gandhi, Swaraj, Self, Learning

'appreciative inquiry' – co-creating for the future

nature as an
inspiration

creative sharing and
(u n) l e a r n i n g
methodologies and ideas

exploring 'neutrality'

REDEFINING CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIL SOCIETY FOR LEARNING SOCIETIES

In our times of radical upheaval, many of the ideas that we have hitherto taken for granted must now be seriously interrogated. Among the most important of these is the notion of democracy, and perhaps more urgently, the nature of citizenship. What, after all, does it mean to be the "citizen" of a nation-state, if ideologies of nationalism are increasingly serving to shut down dissent, stifle debate, and in many cases, inflict violence? Is the idea of citizenship, as it is understood vis-à-vis the nation-state, serving to protect our freedoms and allowing us to articulate the ideas we care about — or is it an exclusionary mechanism that reduces our sense of who we are, and where we belong, to something two-dimensional? Do existing conceptions of national citizenship, and by extension, civil society, really serve the interests of the political present, or have they become institutionalized and dehumanizing? Does the "public sphere," so central to the idea of democracy, really facilitate the articulation of peoples' aspirations and their politics?

Over the past decade or so, these questions have acquired a new level of urgency because of the ways in which governments, corporations, and transnational organizations have become more centralized and corrupt. In South Asia, non-governmental organizations have claimed to speak as 'civil society', yet their roles and credibility are controversial as well, given their dependency on government and foreign funding, their internal hierarchies, and their lack of diversity in purpose, programs or participants. Panchayati Raj Institutions (local government) have added another dimension to the discourse in India. Though, for the most part, they seem to be another arm of the state, consumed by party politics, inept in their power and lacking vision.

Increasingly, it has become apparent that there is a serious gap between the rhetoric and the institutions of liberal democracy. For the conversation on learning societies, it is important to note that people have identified spaces of dissent and political engagement to challenge this institutionalization — frequently outside those places delineated by the conceptual vocabulary of liberalism and modernist notions of citizenship. One sees people learning and evolving creative mechanisms in places that are not weighed down by the narrow, hyper-rational perspective of the modern world order. Identifying such diverse spaces, or what some would call "publics," and energizing them is of vital importance, not only for learning societies, but also if we are to confront the challenges facing the world today.

takhman artists' colony



“Life is full of different colours, different peoples, different thoughts... but when they interact with each other, a new colour, a new thought, a new creation takes place”

the artist in all of us

Day 3 of the conference offered participants an opportunity to interact with artists, volunteers in Udaipur as a Learning City, and the general public of Udaipur. We shifted from the hotel to spend the afternoon and evening at Takhman Artists Colony, a space set up over 30 years ago by artists in Udaipur. With a small gallery, several studio spaces and wide grassy fields, Takhman seeks to facilitate creativity and collaboration in the visual and performing arts. Partnering with Takhman enabled us to both interact with local artists and to bring individuals, groups, ideas, and experiences to a wider audience. It was important to the organizers that the purpose and people of the conference be shared with Udaipur's locals, and not remain isolated on a hilltop.

Entering a new space also provided new energy to the conference. Several activities were facilitated at Takhman: *mural-making* (where conference participants collaborated on painting a 15 foot-long 'learning societies' mural), *interactive booths* (where participants had a chance to share their work with citizens of Udaipur), and *theater workshops* (which resulted in the spontaneous creation and performance of two small plays at the end of the evening). For many people, it helped to extend the purpose of the conference, by re-connecting with another audience and grounding our conversations in a particular place like Udaipur. And perhaps even better, the openness and freedom of the interaction at Takhman generated yet another opportunity to explore the artist in all of us.

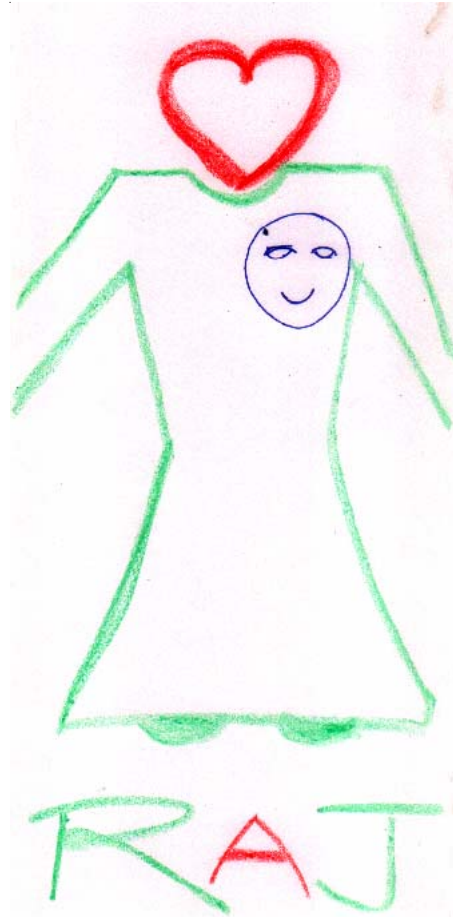


Image by Raj Sethia

Streams are not literate,
Do not read any signboards,
They just flow, flow and flow,
Finally reach to the seashore.

Trees are not educated,
Never do they go to school for anything to know,
They just grow, grow and grow,
Finally become heightened homes for many a crow.
Dogs are never taught how to smell,
What to eat and what to leave,
Fishes are never taught, how to swim,
Mountains are never taught to stay steady
[...]

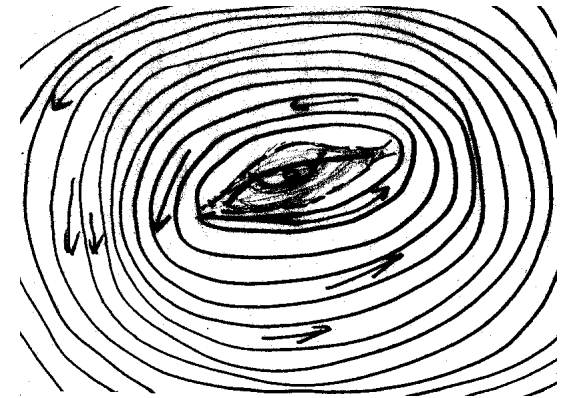
Everything is in tune with nature,
Wonders and colours of nature,
Tunes and melodies of nature,
Creativity and system of nature,
Diversity that prevailed by nature,
All the goodness that hailed by nature,
Literate we, educated we,
Illiterate nature, uneducated nature.

- Japan Pathak

our own learning web



Closing the conference was no easy task. In what way could we share the intimate connections that had emerged among us and also articulate the next actions we were hoping to take together? Since past experiences with sweeping declarations, action plans and committee reports were less than inspiring, conference co-organizers decided to create a web, literally and figuratively, to capture conference outcomes and next steps.



The activity itself was simple, using only a ball of string. Participants stood together in a circle, and each person was invited to name another with whom they made a connection, which would likely carry over into future actions. They then passed the string to that person, after first wrapping it around their own hand, to include themselves as a node in the web. The next person did the same, and so on and so on, until each and every participant had shared their thoughts, feelings and relationships with the entire group. In binding everyone together in a beautiful tangle, the thread symbolized both the intimacy and the interdependency that emerged during the conference. Laughter and tears, joy and heartache, were expressed openly, as participants shared both their hopes and their fears for the future of learning societies. It is likely that the actions mentioned will unfold in the weeks, months and years ahead, and many of the friendships will last a lifetime.

The web of the experience dissolved, in matter but not in spirit, when each person broke off a piece of the string, tied it around their wrist and took it with them, as a parting symbol of their commitment and connection to each other.

There are many traditional stories – with philosophical connotations. This one, titled “Chiya Lisya”, is related to our environment, to the entire universe.

Five princes gathered before a Jamun tree. Seeing some ripe Jamun fruits, they wished to eat some.

The first prince thought, “I’ll cut the tree from its roots.”

The second prince suggested, “Instead of the whole tree, only one of the branches could be cut.”

The third questioned, “Why cut even a branch? Only a bunch could be cut off.”

The fourth said, “Only the ripe ones should be plucked, since these are the only ones we will eat.”

Finally, the fifth prince suggested, “Let’s pick up those which have fallen on the ground near the tree. Why do we need to cut it at all?”

We can live life to the fullest doing little or no harm to our natural surroundings. Let us try living that way.

a tree of
learning

- Jayendra Shah

Ultimately we face powers of violence and injustice,
powers of fear and prejudice...
What and how should we learn, not only to survive but to
maintain and develop humanity?

- Coumba Toure