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Children here are encouraged to think and come up with several different ideas to solve the same problem.

On my way to Ahmedabad, where I was studying at the National Institute of Design, a fellow traveller on the Ahimsa Express asked me why I had decided to study design. “Because I didn’t want to do engineering” was my brusque reply. And there ended our conversation.

Over the next few hours of the journey, I thought about what I had just said. Was that true? Was my career decision a result of an elimination exercise?

Eight of the eleven close friends of mine had enrolled into engineering colleges. The ninth studied medicine and the tenth joined the Army. What had made me choose design? Was it disinterest in engineering that spurred me? What kind of exposure had moulded my decision?

I went to a school that was very focused on academics. Children were segregated into class divisions A, B and C according to their academic performance, A being the toppers. There had definitely been no catalyst in school that helped me develop a creative bent. Or, at least not directly. Perhaps the music lessons nudged the right brain, but that was probably all. I settled on the reason that my mother’s enthusiasm and interest in the arts had rubbed off on me.

Now, in retrospect, after passing out from NID and being a parent to two children, one can observe shortcomings in the system; the first being career guidance in the creative field. Most parents and teachers know very little about careers that jog the right brain, be it architecture, design, film making

or even composing music. They are unaware of the existence of colleges and design schools that nurture these talents. Having been to a design school, I personally know of a large chunk of students who had no idea about the field of design before they got there. Several of my peers had ended up at NID by a matter of chance.

Another factor that is lacking in schools is the provision of inputs that boost creativity. Here, creativity is not to be confused with making things beautiful, it is in fact, a way of thinking.

Creative thinking is associated with the capacity to look critically at reality, explore unconventional alternatives, and perceive situations from innovative perspectives (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) Creative thinking embraces cognitive processes related to innovative problem solving.

There were not many classes at school that made me feel the need to be creative, whether it was solving an arithmetic problem or a chemical equation. Perhaps what came remotely close were the art and craft classes where we tried to cut paper and make beautiful artifacts, but they never really culminated in innovative problem solving.

We do not have immediate solutions for these shortcomings, although the first part seems easier to tackle. Children could be better guided and counseled, they could be exposed to an array of career choices that hone their creative inclinations. Maybe such counseling could highlight that today’s suc-



Successful designers, architects and artists can enjoy lifestyles on par with engineers and doctors. Students and parents must be cured of traditional dismissiveness or uneasiness towards creative fields, which are often seen as full of strugglers and dreamers.

The second part, about introduction to creativity in schools, can be encouraged in two ways. One could have a separate lesson, focused on creative problem solving. Or another way could be through the course subject itself. Teachers could see if there is a way to introduce an element of design thinking within their subject. For example, let's consider a subject like Civics. The way I was taught Civics was simple; I had to rote memorise the laws and acts that were put into place during India's independence. What we were not exposed to, was the context or the circumstance under which those laws came about. What we were not taught, was that each law was the outcome of a problem-solving activity, whether the problem was immediate or distant.

What if the children were put in the shoes of the policy makers? How would they have tackled the same problem? Could they look at the issue from another perspective? Therefore, how different would their law be; and how would that law have, over the years, impacted the Indian society? A classroom activity such as this would help children to explore unconventional alternatives and make them feel empowered because they found innovative solutions to real world problems.

Having identified these gaps in the system, my partner Rahul and I are doing an experiment to bridge them.

We have conducted workshops in Design Thinking for children in the 8-12 age group. The aim of these workshops is twofold; they target these exact two gaps. The workshops begin with acquainting children with the field of design and making them aware of the different disciplines of design practiced across the world. Once they are sufficiently excited and enthused about the field of design, we make them feel like they can do it themselves.

The workshops lay emphasis on thinking, rather than making or drawing. Children are encouraged to think and come up with many ideas to solve the same problem. For instance, a simple exercise of designing a table encourages them to look at the stability of the table in different ways. Once they refine their ideas, they are taught to represent them, not necessarily through making or drawing the solution. The children are given a broad framework within which they can channelise their creative thought. They are provided with a context to solve their problems; a list of criteria and functions that their design must meet.

Although we carry limited experience of conducting these workshops, it is very clear to us from the results, that the children are ready. They are able to grasp these concepts and think out of the box. While we still continue to experiment with different formats and styles of conducting these workshops, this is still a drop in the ocean. If this is taken up at a systemic level and a conscious effort is made to weave in design thinking into the school curriculum, creative problem solving would not only prepare children for any career they may choose, but would also be a critical life skill.

KARISHMA and RAHUL, are both graduates of Industrial Design, from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. With a professional experience of 8 years, Karishma has worked as a Product and Retail designer at Titan Industries. Rahul's professional experience spans over 10 years, where a large part of his career was built at Human Factors International. Currently, they run a company called Twist Open Innovations in Bangalore, which delivers expertise in various areas of design and innovation. Twist Open draws on Karishma and Rahul's rich and diverse experience as a springboard for its aim to be an exponent of Design Thinking and Design Processes. They routinely collaborate with organisations interested in expanding the application of design besides the areas in which it is traditionally utilised, education being a core interest area. They can be contacted at karishma@twistopen.in and rahul@twistopen.in