Nurturing learning

By | Feb 28, 2013

In the village of Rajpur lies a school that will alter your perception of government schools the moment you step inside. The school compound surrounded by a boundary wall is home to old, large trees and has huge grounds that will astonish anyone who compares it with a government school in Delhi. The area is really clean and the garden in the school is impressive too.

I was here to meet Akshay Dixit who was standing with his old students, chit-chatting about their time in school. After the introductions, the children started sharing with me their experiences in the school. They had all joined other schools to continue with their higher studies, but their fond memories of the school keeps them coming back.

I found the story of how the garden came to be quite interesting. Before the garden was made, the space had been filled with garbage. These students had been in the 4th grade when their teacher Akshay Dixit had asked them to suggest ways to clear the garbage. There was a long and loud discussion and many suggestions were thrown up. One student had suggested calling the local municipal authorities to get the area cleared. Another had suggested picking up the trash and dumping it elsewhere. A third student had asked what the point of clearing the space would be. At this, a number of ideas were discussed and when Rohit suggested planting trees, the class unanimously agreed. The space was going to be cleared of garbage and filled with trees! Brimming with enthusiasm, the class began the process the next day itself.

As the children were young, adults in the school cleared the garbage while the children prepared the ground for sowing the seeds. Akshay allocated garden slots to his students, each of whom was responsible for planting and watering in the slot. Akshay brought the seeds himself, and the children sowed them and watered them every day. Reminiscing, Akshay says “Every day, the first thing the children would ask me was “When will the seeds sprout?” When the first shoots started to emerge, it was like a celebration!”

The children began sharing their memories. Each one talked about what they had planted – coriander, tomato, etc. Antima mentioned that she reminds her sister, who’s now studying in the school, to water and take care of the plants, every day.

Rohit complained that Akshay had handed all the coriander and mint slots to the girls to take care of, to which Akshay replies “But all the juicy tomatoes, I’d given to the boys!” Hearing this all the children started laughing.

The children talked about where they were studying now and how often they got to meet one another. All of them mentioned that they barely get to meet Bharati because she’d joined a school in a far off place. At this, at being missed by her classmates and not being able to meet them, Bharati’s eyes started tearing up. And soon the whole group was in tears.

To make the mood more upbeat, Akshay told them he had some good news for them. He was soon going to be teaching them in their schools. And you had to be there to see the excitement! The children started shouting and screaming, all at once, for Akshay sir to visit their school first. They were so eager to study with their primary school teacher again.
Akshay made learning fun and his innovative and nurturing approach to education ensured the students in his classes always had something to learn and look forward to, even after they left the school! You could see the affection Akshay had for his students and from their enthusiasm to study with him once again know that it wasn’t just one-sided.

Ranjana, from Azim Premji Institute for Assessment and Accreditation in Delhi, had visited this school on work and wanted to share with others the work done by Akshay Dixit. The pictures have been clicked by Akshay on his mobile phone.

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memories

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