

Interaction session with parents / PTOs

Making our children great personalities and leaders

*Investing for the future through
Neighbourhood Parliaments of Children*

Our hopes and worries

Resource person : “What are your hopes regarding your children?”

Parent 1 : “We give them good education. We invest much in children’s education. We send them to good schools. So they will get good marks.”

Parent 2 : “They will get good jobs .”

Parent 3 : “They will get good salary.”

Parent 4 : “They will be happy.”

Resource Person : “Now, what are your anxieties regarding your children?”

Parent 1 : “Will they be good persons?”

Parent 2 : “Will they have good values?”

Parent 3 : “Will they not be spoiled by bad company?”

Parent 4 : “Will they be responsible?”

Parent 5 : “Will they look after us when we grow old?”

Resource Person : “What should we do to ensure that they turn out to be really good and responsible?”

Parents : “They should be given good advice.”

Beyond Advice

Teacher 4 : “But all along the history, youngsters have been wary of the advice offered by elders. Children in teens, as they grow up, seem to have a new sense of power. They feel they are in a new world which offers its own challenges and possibilities. When elders give advice the youngsters feel they are giving yesterday’s answers to today’s situations. This is especially now as they normally are more at ease with cell phones, computers and such items than we grown-ups are. They seem to know better for them we tend to appear simply outdated. What could we do?”

- Parents :** We must talk to them through people whose opinions they seem to value most.
- Teachers :** Who are they?
- Parent 6 :** Their own peers. Who else?
- Parent 7 :** Yeah. People of their own age group.

Organized Peer Influence

- Teachers :** True. But how do we make sure that when peers talk among themselves, they talk constructively and meaningfully and do not simply waste time or mislead one another?
- Parents :** We must create an environment, a situation, a milieu, a set up, an expectation wherein everybody feels they have to say something worthwhile, something sensible, if they are to be appreciated, and not considered fools.
- Teacher 1 :** How do we do that ?
- Teacher 2 :** I have heard about Neighborhood Children’s Parliaments (NPC) functioning in some schools. Children are asked to sit in circles of about 30 each. Entire school is organized as such small-sized forums. The grouping is not according to classes they attend, but according to the neighborhoods they come from. They meet every alternative week regularly. They also elect ministers for various concerns that are relevant at their level. Ministry-based meetings take place during the intervening weeks. That is, for example, disability ministers from each NPC, meet as a separate ministry meeting and Environment ministers from each NPC meet as a separate ministry meeting, etc.
- Parent 5 :** That’s interesting. Could you tell us more?
- Teacher 3 :** I too know about that. Each Neighbourhood parliament of children has a child minister each for disability concerns, for the old aged, for child rights, for environment, for sports, for gender sensitivity, etc. Each child minister, and each child parliamentarian, brings up issues that need to be

attended to and children share their opinions on the issues and discuss about them.

Parent 3 : Of course, they have to speak up only what is right and proper or else they can be laughed at. Good idea!

Pushing for depth

Teacher 3 : The idea of making children ministers matters. When you make a child a minister for a concern; say for environment, he has to speak something sensible next week. So what will he or she do?

Parent 4 : He will consult others on what to talk and for new ideas.

Parent 6 : He will read up.

Parent 5 : He will collect all relevant materials from newspapers and magazines. He may make a file for such items.

Teacher 4 : In short, he will be motivated to go deep in to the matter. He will become a specialist on the subject.

Parent 6 : He will become a leader in his own right.

Parent 7 : His curiosity for knowledge will grow and as he goes deep into one subject, he will tend to be studious with regard to other subjects too.

Teacher 5 : It is interesting. When various child ministers of various ministries share information and ideas from various angles, children can have a multi-sided awareness on various issues. An informal learning process that will make them avid for knowledge.

Articulators and Communicators

Teacher 3 : Another possibility too. When children discuss on the problems presented they become more and more articulate. That itself is a learning process.

Resource Person : I know many children who have emerged as good speakers due to this process. If they are attending

these parliaments once a week for two years, definitely they emerge as confident communicators. A real communication training.

Teacher 4 : And after discussing what do they do?

Resource Person : They decide on what they could do individually or collectively. And they go ahead and implement them.

Teacher 4 : Decisions like?

Disciplining Themselves

Resource Person : In a village called Kovalam near, Kanyakumari, children decided to have study timetables, for each one of them. They chalked out a timetable each and hanged the charts in their houses for all to see, marking separate time slots for “lighter subjects”, “hard subjects”, “helping the family”, etc.. On one occasion, a mother asked her son to run an errand to the shop. The child pointed out the timetable showing that there is a time allotted for such works! Well, initially irritating. But the parents were happy and proud that their children were taking things seriously. They don’t need to advice children anymore to study.

Teacher 5. : I too have read about these children’s parliaments. Children in these parliaments have brought in better facilities in schools. They have got schools upgraded. They have brought for the villages new street lights, new bus routes, new bridges, new access roads, etc.

Proactive Achievers

Parent 5. : That means they become proactive. That means, instead of just thinking just about their own difficulties and complaining, they are thinking constructively about what they can do for others. That is great. That will make them happy. They will grow up as positive people. Good formation.

Teacher 2 : I have listened to some sessions where child parliamentarians shared their experiences . Some of them explained how they would earlier spent their entire time before TV, with no seriousness of purpose, and how now they are spending time with better direction and purpose. In general they tend also to study better after joining children’s parliaments. A kind of quest for knowledge is created by the process.

Formation through Action

Resource person : The entire approach is highly formative. We call it formation through action. And we distinguish it from what we call formation through activities. We know the difference, isn’t it. (?)

Parent 6 : Yeah, I was told about that in a youth movement. “Activities” are programmes thought about by others. You go through those activities; but they don’t leave a mark on you. “Action” is more in terms of what happens when you yourself come face to face with a situation, you feel about it, you think about it, make value judgments about it, make decisions on it, commit yourself to do something about it, jump in to the arena, evaluate the pros and cons etc. and the entire process leaves a mark on you.

Resource Person : Exactly. We call it also integral formation. It touches all the aspects of a personality. Now let me ask, when is a person good?

Parent 3 : When his feelings are properly oriented.

Parent 2 : When his intellect is guided by proper values.

Parent 5 : When he wills good.

Parent 6 : When he actually does good things.

Parent 1 : When he relates well with others.

Parent 5 : When he has an open mind and when one is constantly able to evaluate and reevaluate the impact of one's actions.

Resource person : A good formation should therefore touch him at the level of feelings, intellect, will, action, relationships etc. Can you make a guess how children's parliaments help this way for an integral or all-round formation.

All-inclusive formation

Teacher1 : (No 1) I have seen in such meetings Child ministers and child parliamentarians narrating with a lot of feelings the various problems and sufferings they see in their areas. Other children who might at times overlook such problems are made to feel the intensity of such problems. They get, so to say, sensitized.

Resource person : Good. Children's parliaments can make them feel for others. It creates a habit of being proactive in feelings. Then ...?

Teacher 2 : When they discuss together in groups, their values are clarified. They also tend to be articulate. Their brains get sharpened.

Resource person : That is intellectual formation. Then..?

Teacher 2 : When they make decisions their will is involved. And they have to do things in groups. They have to work as a team. Good-training in team spirit. In relating to people.

Resource Person : Another significant aspect in these groups is the practice of "review", review of decisions, actions, and the follow-up. Almost every meeting begins with some kind of review. They are also encouraged

to have a review of life on special sessions. How does that help?

Parent 1 : (No.1) It could help them to be open-minded and realistic.

Resource person : A good thing happens when children have their small, small achievements. That is they are appreciated. This builds their self-confidence. Encourages them of on more and more constructive involvements. Builds a kind of taste for good deeds.

Every Child A Leader

Parent 3. : This way they will also become leaders.

Resource Person : Fine. Let us go more into that. What other ways does it help for leadership?

Teacher 4 : A leader is the one who knows the way, shows the way and goes the way. Here the very process builds awareness and clarity, tones up articulation and communication skills, and encourages positive action and involvement.

Resource person : Great. Great leaders have come up from this movement for children's parliaments. Malala Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel Prize winner is one. She was the speaker of children's parliament in Swat, Pakistan.

Children's parliament approach gives scope for leadership growth to not just a few children, but to all the children.

Parent 4 : How do you say that?

Resource person : Our approach is not of giving chances to some people but to all the members. The approach is also one of small-sized face-to-face circles, groups or communities. It is small enough to ensure that

everybody gets chances. Everybody is reached. Everybody is integrated. Everybody gets attention. Every aspect is responded to. It creates a situation where everybody cannot but participate and grow.

Parent 3 : It is so wonderful a programme.

Parent 4 : We should have this for all our children.

Integrating other movements

School Coordinator : I too am getting convinced. It is a highly effective programme. But how do we find a slot for this in the school time-table? We have so many other activities and clubs going on.

Resource Person : That is a genuine concern. I shall share how some schools tackle this. They integrate the program with the period meant for extra-curricular activities, for value clarification, moral instruction, associations etc.

Teacher 4 : So this becomes a kind of contextual value-clarification, and applied moral instruction.

Teacher 2 : Maybe we could also call it “Discover-it-yourself value-clarification”.

Resource Person : Fine. One period during the week, mostly the last period, all the children meet in residential-area-based groups of about 30 children each. And the next week, at the same time, they come together in ministry-based groups.

Teacher 3 : How many ministries can they have?

Resource Person : As many as possible and as needed. No limit. In one school they have 23 ministries. All the other existing activities are integrated with these ministry-meetings. For example, if there is a Green Army Club it is integrated with environment

ministry. Red Ribbon, meant for AIDS-related response, gets integrated with health ministry, or can simply be called AIDS ministry. The same way, Red Cross. Find out what it focuses on, like life-skills or disaster management, and have a ministry for that. Or, simply call it Red Cross ministry.

School Coordinator : That is workable. This way both the NPCs and these clubs are strengthened: NPCs get additional inputs for their discussions and action; and these groups like Green Army and Red Ribbons can ensure that their concerns are shared with all the students as they reach all the NPCs through the ministers.

Headmaster : As a headmaster I am thrilled at the possibilities the programme offers. It is really getting the whole school geared for practice-based citizenship training. What better role, what more satisfying role, could we have than forming responsible citizens and reliable leaders for our country!

Wider involvement

Parent 1 : What about the expenses side?

Teacher 2 : Yeah. It seems at least some children will have to go for meetings at district, state and national levels.

Teacher 4 : Then also, the ministry-meetings and training programmes may need at times some external resource persons. This also would need money.

Resource Persons : Money need not be the deterring problem. Even without money a lot could be done. But money helps. You could do more effectively if you have some money. You have rightly mentioned about meetings at the levels of the district , state, nation etc. They are very helpful. They widen the horizons

of children and give children better challenges, dreams and visions, very essential for leaders. They give connectedness, perspectives and sense of empowerment and are a big motivation to perform better. Such programmes need, not only travel money but also organizational expenses. Someone or other has to shoulder that responsibility and some people have to work at it and we have to support them.

Investing for happiness

- Parent 1** : I will be happy to contribute for that.
- Parent 2** : I too. When we spend so much for getting better marks for children, should we not spend some money for better values, better hearts, better characters, better minds, and better leadership in children?
- Parent 5** : This is really an investment for future happiness.
- Parent 3** : Happiness of our children tomorrow.
- Resource person** : No man lives in an island. Your children's happiness will not be complete unless the entire world is helpful. It is not enough to help at one school level. We must support organizations that promote such movements throughout the world. Some families make it a point to set aside some money regularly for such movements and support wider organizational efforts, because they are conscious of their importance. We need to have such a culture of giving for wider causes more and more.
- Parent 1** : Why don't we start today right here a network for such support? I shall come around to collect names and addresses of people who would like to be part of it and support the children's parliament

movement at ever wider levels. Small drops will make an ocean.

Teacher 4 : We teachers will be happy to support you with enthusiasm. We shall willingly help to facilitate the children's parliaments meetings in addition to making financial sacrifices.

Parent 3 : We shall work together. We shall help in this work of facilitation also. We shall also look for some volunteers to assist you in this in the school.

Headmaster : We shall together make this a grand success.

Resource person : With such generosity the future looks bright for our children and for children everywhere. Thank you.