



OPINION

Letter she could have written to her parents

Kota reported yet another student suicide recently. Policymakers, teachers, and parents need to ask if the blame lies in the culture of competition encouraged in the school education system

“Mummy Papa — I can't do JEE so I Suicide. / I am loser. / I worst daughter/ Sorry Mummy Papa./ Yehi last option hai”. — Girl, 18, who committed suicide in January in Kota, Rajasthan.

All of us want to know from our mummies and papas what it is that we have to do to ensure that we are not losers. How do you plan to help us discover our passion and potential?

Everyone tells us that the world of tomorrow is very different but are you preparing us for this world? We are told that at the heart of education is me — your child — and everything should be focused on learning for human flourishing. Then why are so many of us not able to cope, relax, reflect, breathe, express our emotions or even understand if we have a self to find? Your only concern seems to be our employability.

Our life is not a package deal. It has

within it the sights, sounds, colours, fragrances, reflections, impressions, and learnings of our growing up years. This will create the adult who will stand before you tomorrow. Today, we are expected to reach a stereotyped system of ordinates, which binds us into a straitjacket of choices, according to the demands prevailing in our families or a particular segment of society.

We are surrounded by a high pressure culture that has become a national problem, where the perpetrators are parents, teachers, coaching centres and schools. The entire plethora of society seems to be conspiring against us. No one looks at our deeper needs and ascertains our choices and challenges. How can an entire community, given the rate of success in competitive examinations, pin our lives on an imaginary supposition of being able to “qualify”? This is in itself a negative assumption.

There are guidelines on coaching centres that are released frequently. But why should there be any coaching centres at all? Why don't you fix the school system? The only policy and process that should be focused on is teachers teaching their discipline and schools becoming crucibles of critical and creative thinking. The basic learning syllabi for competitive exams for young adults should be dovetailed into school-leaving exams. Why is the

gap not bridged with what is taught in schools and what is asked in competitive exams?

We need a revolution in our education systems because their inadequacy has created parallel learning communities around them. If we had thought differently about it in the first place, so many children would not have died. We have created our own crisis with the victims being the young: Suicide is the third largest cause of death among 15–20 years old in India.

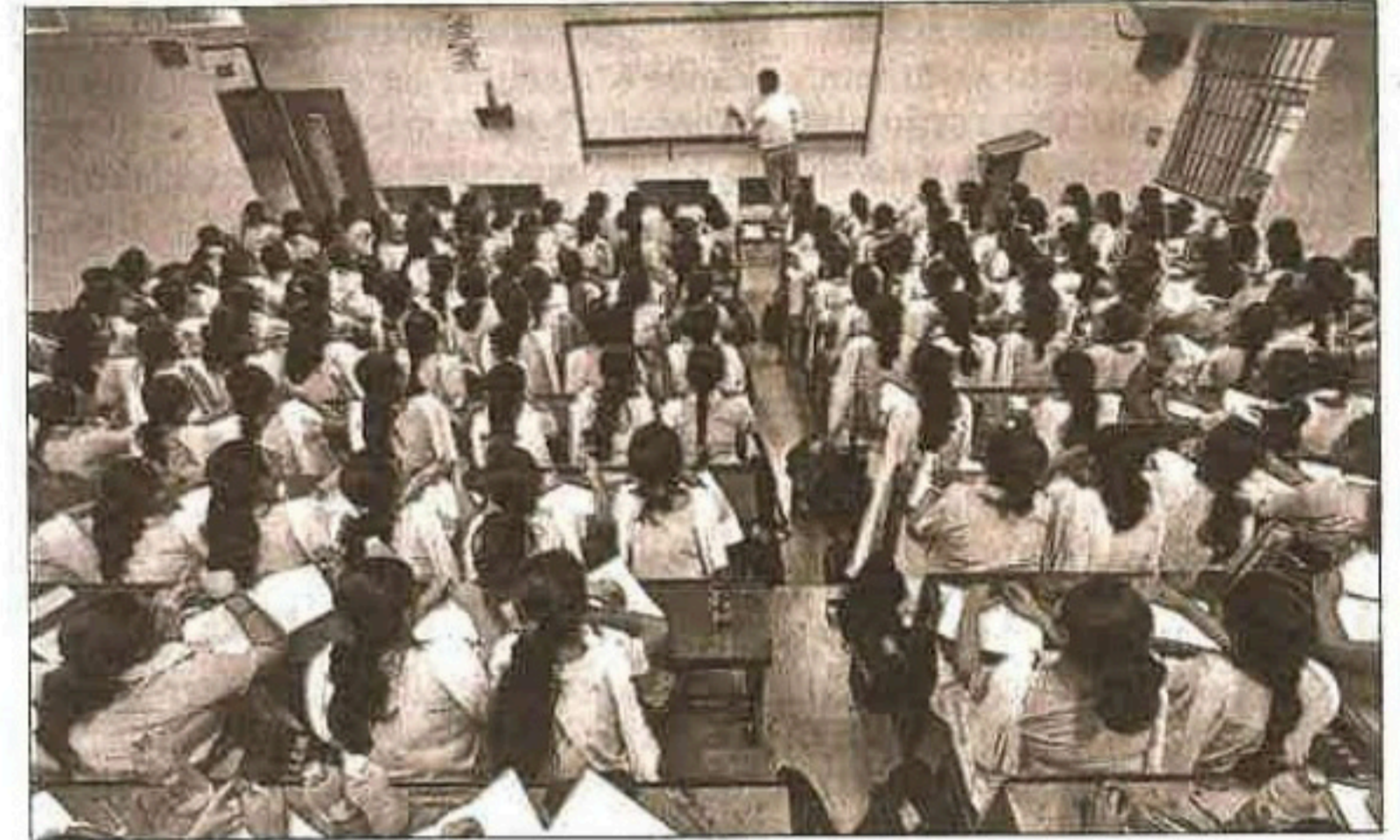
The tragedy is that due to the education system in schools, children are not aware of their potential and talents and what they are capable of achieving. We have to understand that learning in its true sense is a combination of personalised development and mindfulness, not a product that is homogenised, atomised and industrialised.

There is a world that exists, whether we exist or not. An outer world of objects, physicality, other people and events. There is another world that comes into being when we do, which will be different according to our beliefs, private interests and personal belongings.

Education should bridge these two worlds by relating one to the other. The problem is that because of market needs, a great deal of time is spent educating the outer world while neglecting the inner one. Children



Ameeta
Mulla
Wattal



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have been fixed in the outer world, which loads them with information and increases distraction.

A crisis of human resources is facing us. In 20 years, there will be a revolution that will affect communities, schools, and entire education systems. We need to focus on this crisis because education today is mechanistic, data driven and filled with information whereas human beings are not mechanisms but organisms. In order to ensure the connection between the inner and the outer worlds and prevent disengagement and disaffection, we have to bring in a new real child-centric culture.

Over the millennia, humans have evolved a sense of imagination and creativity, from which we have obtained the power of empathy to put ourselves in someone else's position and imagine what it would be like for them. Empathy is very important — creativity and intuition flow from it. The reason so many of the young get depressed and seem lost is because they lose that connection and don't have a sense of purpose. True learning will help to connect. Today, schools, in order to adjust to new societal

demands and expectations, are being transformed in identity and role. From socio-cultural enclaves that cultivate the mind and spirit, they have transformed into mere centres for the acquisition of skills for a world economic market. This may fetch monetary benefits but may necessitate decisions that have dire consequences.

Education has come to gain a quantitative significance and “having” is more important than “being”. The result of this attitude is that education has not enhanced our humanism. The field of educational leadership must be reconstructed so that the transformation of schools and society becomes its central force.

As children, will we always need to adhere to the demands of society? Do we not need someone somewhere to see our own realities?

You have to answer these questions and reflect on these conundrums. Our life is not easy anymore!

Ameeta Mulla Wattal is chairperson and executive director, education, innovations and training, DLF Schools and Scholarship programmes. The views expressed are personal