

If you are a parent.....



By Azim H. Premji

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If you are a parent, you have many aspirations for your child that may include him or her becoming a doctor, an engineer, scientist or another kind of successful professional. I believe these aspirations are driven by your thinking about your child's future, and her centrality in your life.

Since good education is often the passport to a good future, I presume it leads you to getting your child admitted to a good school. Then you encourage your child to study hard and do well in school exams. To bolster this, you send him or her for tuition classes. This would have primed your child for board exams and entrance exams, thereby leading to admission into a good professional course. Doing well at college increases the probability of landing a good job. And a good job means the child's future is ensured.

I am neither a psychologist nor an educationist, and what I will now state may

seem counter-intuitive. I think that these aspirations and actions might be doing more harm than good to your child. To understand why, we need to re-examine some of our fundamental assumptions.

In the first place, I have seen time and again that living for some distant future goal also means you do not live in the present. The distant goal will always translate into an external measure of success, such as exams. And most exam-focused children start forgetting what it means to be a child – to be curious, mischievous, exploring, falling, getting up, relating, discovering, inventing, doing, playing.

Childhood is very precious; precious enough not to be wasted by the artificial pressures of contrived competition, by too many hours of bookish study, and by school report cards that simplistically wrap up an entire human being in numbers.

The second assumption is that education is merely a ticket to socio-economic success. Given the state of our country, this reality cannot be ignored. But restricting education to only this aspect is, I think, a very limiting notion of the aim of good education. The primary purpose of a school is to guide the child in her discovery of herself and her world, and to identify and nurture the child's talents. Just as every seed contains the future tree, each child is born with infinite potential. Imagine a school which sees children as seeds to be nurtured – here the teacher is a gardener who helps to bring out the potential already present in the child.

This is very different from the current view which sees the child as clay to be moulded – where the teacher and parents are potters deciding what shape the clay should take. There is an old (and forgotten) Chinese saying **“Give a seed to a potter, and you will get a bonsai”**.

Even in a commercial organization, to make profits we do not have to chase profits. Rather, we need to build an institution that gives every employee an opportunity to do meaningful and fulfilling work.

Create an organization driven by values of innovation, integrity, customer centricity and care. And as you practice these values everyday and moment, you will see that the profits take care of themselves.

Similarly, dear parent, this is my request to you. Do not give up your child’s present to secure his or her future. Give your child the freedom to truly explore life with abandon. In doing this, you will see your child flower into a creative and sensitive human being. And when this happens, everything else – money, social success, security – will fall into place automatically.

Let your child be a child.