

GLIMPSE OF THE WONDER WORLD



LEARNING ABOUT EDUCATION FROM THE PRACTITIONERS

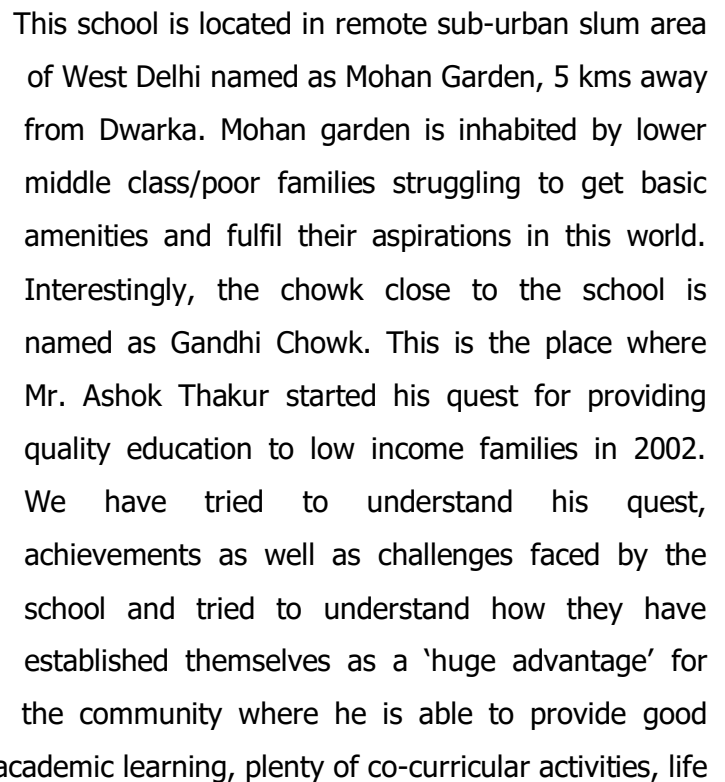
Muni International School, Delhi

– ‘A school which believes in leading by
example instead of criticizing others’

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THIS ARTICLE FOCUSES ON CORE PRINCIPLES, SCHOOL MANAGEMENT,
PEDAGOGY & METHODS OF THE SCHOOL.



Despite being a low-investment school in a disadvantaged locality, this school offers separate classrooms for each class with proper ventilation, clean and purified drinking water, kitchen garden, separate toilet for boys and girls, facilities for arts/crafts/music, library, science laboratory, tab for each student to access online and offline learning resources, teaching Japanese/French/German etc. The school is accessible to all kinds of students. In general, they encourage poor performing students to take admission in the school. This school doesn't believe in grabbing the talent, owning and showcasing it. On the contrary, it believes in handholding academically weak students and helping them excel in their lives. Most of the students come from immediate surroundings while a few of them come from far away locations. Some parents have also taken a house/flat/room on rent so that their children can study in this school. This school is affiliated till class 10th. They are not able to get affiliation



for class 12th due to RTE/infrastructure related rules. Currently, 700 students are studying in this school. The school has 40 staff members out of which 30 are teachers. Most of the teachers come from nearby community. They are trained in school's philosophy and methodology so that they are able to facilitate the processes in an efficient manner.

Perspectives that guide the school-

The founder shared that he couldn't get proper education during childhood due to financial & structural problems (there was a pain/concern that it shouldn't happen to other children like him), most of the things he learnt was through experiences, facing challenges, inquiry and he was curious to know how people become **KNOWLEDGEABLE**. These things helped to shape his philosophy and later the school's philosophy. He also shared his experiences from army where initially he was not able to cope up with physical training, was ridiculed due to poor performance but won many awards later in the same field. He also feels that failing in life rarely gives us another opportunity but in school/educational institutions many artificial situations can be created to test ourselves and learn from experience. Engagement with tough & challenging situations gives us the clarity and confidence that we can do something in the outside world. He creates lot of difficult situations and challenges through which students gain practical experiences. He believes that human beings can falter but can also become 'able' at doing something through dedication and hard work.

About being knowledgeable he received many answers – focus on memorizing, thinking, analysing, focus on concepts, meditation, meditating on the subject, good genes, good deeds from past lives, understanding reality, etc. He chose understanding reality as the option for teaching self and children as a guiding principle. He feels that once anyone starts understanding reality about self, nature, relationships and society, the door of knowledge automatically opens for the person and the person is able to live the knowledge thus attained. He has seen it through personal experiences and multiple experiences with children. He also says that children are naturally endowed to learn and acquire knowledge and skills. E.g he quoted one incident from a workshop in VandeMatram Foundation where he was involved in organizing a workshop for children where 1400 children learnt 40-45 skills within 40 days without any teacher.

Along with their inherent core beliefs about human beings, education and content of education, they have also learnt from Madhyastha darshan/Jeevan Vidya which shares lot of common perspectives with their idea of a good human being/school/society. This philosophy has given them a detailed vision & plan to work up on and added more fuel to their passion, curiosity and creative energy. In short, the school's philosophy proposes that human beings have the potential to live healthily, happily, prosperously

and be useful to family and society. Education is the tool through which this potential can be converted into ability. They believe that increase in human understanding and sensitivity can lead to stronger character and efficiency in work. The founder says that real education means harmony between gyan, vigyan and vivek. (can be loosely translated as knowledge, science & rationality).

Mr. Ashok Thakur says that he doesn't prefer activism, he prefers to work and lead by example. His school and its philosophy is a response to inefficiency/malpractices in the field of education. And these thoughts didn't occur suddenly. Slowly, they have expanded their philosophy based on their work and study – a philosophy that is aimed at evolution of human being through developing his/her understanding, providing life skills and leadership skills. This philosophy defines purpose of education for them as well – an education that provides happiness, self-discipline and makes a person useful for family and society. He says - an ideal education should also make student a self-learner, so that he/she can learn from anything/anyone and use that learning for his work/life. So, instead of giving all the attention on creating knowledge and skills for livelihood one should also learn about self, relationships, nature, social institutions and systems, etc.

Key points about school philosophy and its practical implications-

The Muni methodology facilitates a child to prepare adequately for the approaching future, today. This is through a combination of self-organization, self-management, self-exploration and clarity of understanding one-self in the larger context of co-existence along with the interdependencies and interconnections that make co-existence possible.

<p>The method of GUIDED DISCOVERY fosters imagination, enquiry and self-exploration among the students who learn the curriculum through dialogue and peer support facilitated by the teacher.</p>	<p>THE BASIS OF TEACHING METHODOLOGY:</p> <p>Upayogita /utility</p> <p>Purakta / Complementarity</p> <p>Bhagidari / Participation</p>
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Essential Features - Muni International School (request readers to consider & evaluate them before reading the details) –

Self-Competition	To compete with one's own previous performance
Buddy System	Bully Free Classes. Facilitate true Peer-to-Peer learning
Primary Parents Monitoring System (PPMS)	Involvement of parents to monitor behavior change in students and to increase mutual understanding
Situation Creation	To create that one intense moment of interest in a topic. Develops interest of students in a given topic by relating it with everyday life.
Centre Work	Find fusion of subjects in one topic to encourage scientific research and thought process as a group, and develop multiple perspectives
Career Selection	Multi techniques of evaluation. To choose the right path and be able to work with passion and self-satisfaction
Exam Evaluation	To self-evaluate problems faced during written exams so that students can improve their ability to write exams.
Logical Thinking	To increase logical and analytical reasoning at an early age
Brain Mapping	To increase the ability to imagine and visualize. Exploring unseen objects and events.
Traffic Rules	To cultivate the habit of obeying traffic rules
Interconnected network	To understand that existence is in co-existence. To understand interconnection and interdependence of human beings, nature and the universe
Progress Chart	To make students self-evaluate their efficiency and improve incrementally

Syllabus merge	To understand the subject as a whole, even if the contents of a given topic were spread over later years of school. Children do not have to wait to go to a higher class to understand more about the same topic. They can do it anytime they want.
After I am Educated	Adopt and apply learning in day to day life. Organizing information in a chapter into 4 levels – to stay healthy, to lead a prosperous life, to feel fulfilled in relationships and to participate in social organization and live in harmony with 4 orders of nature – material, plant, animal and human.
Skills to understand life	Self-evaluation to develop capability and adaptability to understand life
Answer Pattern	Skills to answer to the point in exams or any similar context and presentation skills
Revival Day	Developing a culture of experiential knowledge sharing that kindles intrinsic motivation when concepts get transformed to working models through human endeavor.
HADS	Hand writing improvement and learn virtually any language
About	Self-Expression and Presentation. Express about seen objects and events. Increase ability to express.
Searching for learning style	Multi learning method to find the best learning way for a child.
Kitchen Garden	Nature proximity. To grow fresh organic vegetables and to build gardening as a skill
Habits	Practicing right habits. To cultivate habits that help in leading a harmonious life.

Evaluation Patterns **To increase learning efficiency by a unique peer evaluation process derived from an ancient Indian learning process adapted to suit the current context.**

Subject Walls **To use the class room as supporting material to create an environment for learning. Class room walls are used as subject walls**

Class Duration **Innovative extended class duration to complete a topic and eventually the syllabus.**

Recall time **Every class recalls what they have done today and one by one discuss their views**

Fruit time **Students take seasonal fruit in fruit time to understand the meaning of seasons and the fruit which is beneficial in a specified area.**

Key Principles & Thoughts followed by the school-

- 1) Holistic education (focus on all dimensions of personality)
- 2) Guided discovery
- 3) Presenting scientific and relevant content
- 4) Belief in child's abilities and diversity in talent/interests
- 5) Giving opportunity to the child to express and create
- 6) Knowledge is constructed rather than memorized
- 7) Focus on co-curricular activities
- 8) Teacher diverse roles - as facilitator, motivator, mentor & partner in possibilities
- 9) Maintain adequate PTR
- 10) Encouraging peer learning
- 11) Encouraging cooperation and mutual support
- 12) Parliamentary system
- 13) Value based education (based on developing knowledge and rationality)
- 14) Teaching language from exposure, simulation and experience rather than rote
- 15) Emphasis on learning foreign languages

- 16) Include training on yoga & meditation
- 17) Life skill training
- 18) Every child has the potential to learn.
- 19) Although, the founder says that it's really difficult for a child to excel in everything academics, music, sports, theatre etc but still one should have exposure of multiple disciplines. He believes in interdisciplinary learning and thus encourages students to pursue multiple themes/disciplines.
- 20) They track child's response after providing exposure. Also, consult astrologists, palmists, psychologists to see what a particular child can become in future. They encourage the child to do that in higher classes.
- 21) All subjects are given equal importance while designing classroom processes and teaching.
- 22)** They have created their own way of following constructivist philosophy. They have created a study pattern which encourages child to think, analyze, imagine, relate to live experiences, see utility of knowledge in practical life, etc.
- 23) Extra emphasis on character development - Understanding self through discussion and behavior, understanding relationships, social issues, etc. (e.g for understanding what is right food habit teachers The term eating habits (Food habits) refer to why and how people eat, which foods they eat, and with whom they eat as well as the way people obtain, store, use and discard food.

WAYS TO MOTIVATE AND ENGAGE STUDENTS IN A MORE MEANINGFUL MANNER-

- 1) Guided discovery** is very useful method adopted by the school as it helps the children to identify, compare, analyze, build & evaluate their hypotheses, etc. Thus, it helps to channelize intellectual & creative energy of the children. It has contributed immensely to the teaching profession as well, firstly channeling the high energy of children into an inspired learning and teaching activity and secondly providing the teacher an opportunity to work very creatively on facilitation and guided discovery of the child with focus and energy.
 - 2) RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (R&D)** division exists since the inception of the school in 2002, to monitor stumbling blocks or learning obstacles that a student might face as well as teaching methodologies. It also works to find the future needs of our society, our country or the world at large within their respective cultures and traditions.
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- 3) Aiklavya method** – self-study system in which all learning methods are included into single fold. This method grants each child independence and self-reliance to bring out their true understanding and talent through their own efforts. This framework re-imagines every student to be both, a learner as well as a teacher, encouraging creation and sharing of knowledge within the classroom.
- 4) GRS/Group Reciprocal System** – All children are divided into groups for deep and focused learning. Group is responsible for learning and growth of each child. They do their work collaboratively and understand each topic together. They can approach the teacher if they are not able to understand any topic.
- 5) UPLC-** Its a study pattern followed by them. (Understand – identify problems/questions with the concept– learn – complete information and create.) Each and every child from class 3-10 is aware about the process and follows it for their learning. This study pattern is also pasted on the walls. e.g while learning triangles children learn about the concept, practice problems, but they also reflect on **OBSERVING & IDENTIFYING** triangles around them and how newly acquired concepts/principles can be applied by them.
- 6) Teachers appreciation and feedback** – teachers appreciate and reinforce good behavior.
- 7) Am I able** – focus on self and evaluation of self (by the child) to learn right evaluation of one's knowledge and behavior. They also discuss their understanding with fellow students and juniors to see whether they have actually understood or not.
- 8) Jeevan Vidya** as universal human value education – Purpose of education is making each child understand the true purpose in life and live in personal, family, social and natural life accordingly. Jeevan vidya, a new concept intended to teach them live harmoniously with self, family, society and nature.
- 9) Role play** is widely used in primary classes to increase sensitivity, empathy, linguistic abilities and conceptual knowledge.
- 10) Hexagonal seating arrangement** so that there is no seating first or last, everyone can see the teacher/other children and the teacher can see each child. Children sit in small groups (6-8 students in each group).

SELECTION AND TRAINING-

- 1) Seek fresh talent with less number of years as experience through ad, mouth publicity etc.
- 2) Written exam/Interview for knowledge and aptitude

- 3) Try to see some personal concern/pain about education
- 4) Proper training and demonstration classes
- 5) Feedback from students about teacher (demonstration class)
- 6) Monitoring and feedback in initial time period
- 7) Founder, principal and director are the authority to create & implement any process.
- 8) It is done as per the need. Students' feedback is a must.
- 9) Founder and principal decide role for teachers. Performance appraisal done by looking at progress made by children. Teachers who are sent to lead other schools/branch are identified due to high performance in teaching.
- 10) Encourage them/motivate them, share experiences, take feedback, also engage in informal conversation but zero tolerance on compromise in quality of teaching.
- 11)** Founder/principal receives/provides inputs/feedback to the teachers during meetings and class observation. Normal teachers have evolved into really good teachers in gradual course of time. School philosophy, environment and classroom processes have also improved through these efforts.

STAFF MANAGEMENT

The Founder and the principal personally interact with students about their learning to see how teachers are working. They also give and receive feedback on teaching and learning processes after classroom observation. Each child is given multiple opportunities to excel according to their talent and interests. The school puts emphasis not just on academics but on good behaviour, arts, yoga, dance, theatre etc.

We found out that the school realizes that it's not practically possible to be there with each student and each child all the time. So, they have utilized their experiences to create a system which automatically keeps the teachers and learners in a reflective mode. For example - The system is designed in a way that the teacher begins a topic with 'situation creation' by asking questions and then giving the lesson for understanding and then share their understanding within group and with the rest of the groups as well. Later, he/she has to further problematize the topic to help them understand it in details.

Children lead the teaching and verify each other's knowledge through discussion (teacher observes). It is very difficult for the teacher to speak without listening. Most of the time teacher begins a topic by asking questions or generating a discussion and then giving them something to read and share their understanding, later he/she has to further problematize the topic to help them

understand it in details, also create interesting assignments etc. Sometimes children lead the teaching and sometimes they verify each other's knowledge through discussion (teacher observes). During these processes, teacher listens to the child and knows about their interests and knowledge. They consider it while giving assignments/interacting with them.

Parliamentary system and court enables students to learn leadership, empathy, teamwork, critical thinking, responsibility & participation in society. Child's self-respect and dignity is increased through giving them challenges and responsibilities. e.g through parliamentary committees multiple responsibilities like cleanliness, beautification, events, educating a visitor about the school, etc. are shared. Every child gets an opportunity for becoming an MP/MLA as roles are changed every month.

CORE ELEMENTS OF TEACHING PEDAGOGY FOLLOWED AT THE SCHOOL

- Case studies
- Play
- Classroom tasks/assignments
- Video sequences
- Guided learning
- Information- communication technology to enhance learning
- Field experiences
- Others– self-observation, self-evaluation, group discussion, peer feedback system, meeting guests/eminant personalities- sharing experiences/interacting with them.

HOW DOES THE ENTIRE DAY GO IN THE SCHOOL? (A TYPICAL DAY)

- Morning assembly. (No morning prayer, all the teachers/MPs/MLAs take an oath that they will give their best despite any challenges to create valuable education for everyone in the school). All the students are divided in 4 groups club, cultural, health and sports and they have to go to one particular theme from another in specified period of time. They have to pursue one theme for one week. Thus, each child gets proper exposure of each theme in a month. New activities are added/conducted in these themes to make these sessions interesting and there is plenty of learning exchange.
- Subject wise periods.

- Each subject follows UPLC study pattern (understand, find problems/questions, learn and create)
- Lunch
- National anthem - led by different music groups in rotation (done with instruments)
- Study continues
- One period to understand self, relationships, values, social issues, etc.
- Thursday is kept for consolidation of learning and revision

Teachers are trained by founder/senior teachers within Muni International School, Delhi. They are also given periodic training/instructions by Principal and Academic director. During selection, management keeps in mind that they give priority to aptitude and knowledge over prior experience and qualification. In this manner, they get teachers who can adapt to their philosophy and methodology. Above all, he has created a system which has to be followed by teachers & students inside the school. (e.g focus more listening and speaking with the child in younger classes instead of directly jumping on writing, pattern of learning – Group discussion, UPLC (understand, problem, learn, create) and group reciprocal system.)

Children are learning from behaviour and small discussions as per syllabus and context; parents learn it gradually through students and parent-teacher meetings. Children are happy, confident and have basic clarity about the philosophy. The school management urges the parents to listen to their experiences and insights from school and ask questions.

There is specially focus to-

- 1) Develop inter-personal and intrapersonal skills
- 2) Develop communication skills
- 3) Develop sense of responsibility and hard work
- 4) Acquire foreign languages
- 5) Learn practical utility of knowledge
- 6) Learning about nutrition, health, acupressure, etc.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND DISCIPLINE:

Students self-govern themselves, teachers pitch in if they aren't able to resolve any issue by themselves. The school has written zero-tolerance towards bullying in the centre of each class (right above the blackboard). If any students tries to disrupt the class or misbehaves with someone then the entire class is supposed to immediately object towards the behaviour. In

addition to it, there is a judiciary committee run by students who has a representative within each class to oversee matters of bullying, indiscipline etc. Teachers do not subscribe to hard methods, instead teacher talks with parents and child/group to overcome limitations. They support and help the child to learn from mistakes and perform. still, if any child is adamant about his behavior then they restructure the child. There is no compromise on discipline. The founder says that he can tolerate inefficiency in academic work but can't tolerate indiscipline if it is influencing school culture. Children are clear about this rule.

THINGS THAT MAKE LEARNING INTERESTING-

- 1) Good behavior by teachers and children (mutual respect, transparency etc.)
- 2) Study pattern followed by them (GD, UPLC, panchadik, dashadik etc.)
- 3) Parliamentary system and democratic values
- 4) Music, theatre, arts and crafts
- 5) Life skills training
- 6) Universal human Value education through interesting discussion in a gradual manner
- 7) Rules co-created and followed by students.

The team keeps a close look on pedagogical practices being implemented. Teachers are encouraged to write their lesson plans. Principal and director personally involve themselves in teaching and learning processes and observe classrooms. For content and methodology, they have fixed some study patterns (based on experience). These study patterns/resources work as guidelines for new teachers. They also prepare a monthly class-wise/school-wise schedule and paste it on the notice board in respective classrooms.

- Every morning – Informal sharing and oath.
- 1 hour (after school gets over) – planning, feedback and discussion for next day
- School related events are designed in a way that it gives multiple opportunities to each child to learn either through observation or through direct participation. Mostly it's both observation and participation.

TECHNOLOGY EVERYWHERE (COULDN'T DISCUSS ABOUT TECHNOLOGY IN PERSON, SOURCE WEBSITE):

Muni International School applies all the modern educational technologies like online education, audio visual aids, Student tablets to impart the most up-to-date knowledge to the students. The

school scientifically analyzes the strength and weakness of each student through a study in which student's family history, wishes and aptitude are enlisted and with the help of experts and psychiatrists the school takes up multiple remedial measures to make the student grow to his/her full potential.

The school employs latest technologies like blackboard app, which provides SMS information to parents about children on entering and leaving the school, messages on any changes in school timings, holiday/outing/games day etc.

The students are not made to carry heavy school bags. All the next day activities including are uploaded to the school tablet. Every student can access his/her study material using a unique password. This password remains the same for all the years the student studies in the school. Teachers/Parents are able to access past records of their students/wards through this system.

OUTCOMES:

- Consistent format of facilitation of education from LKG to 10th grade
- Consistent and natural method of facilitating value education
- Continuous R&D and Innovation for staying relevant during changing times
- Exponential learning capability in students
- Self-organization, Self-management, Self-reliance in students
- Holistic development of student
- Elimination of large variations in student results
- Elimination of major dependency on teacher qualifications, motivation, capacity, skills, training and individual dispositions
- Increased loyalty and reverence of the student towards school and teachers
- Stress free students, teachers and parents
- International quality education at affordable fees
- Scalability of the model due to simplicity and universality

A TYPICAL MUNI STUDENT:

- Understands co-existence
- Healthy
- Intellectually sharp
- Spiritually aware
- Emotionally mature
- Understands how to stay relevant
- Positive attitude
- Right behavior
- In harmony with self, others and rest of nature
- Learns Practically
- Understands, Believes, Recognizes, Fulfils Holistic outlook
- Understands and fulfils relationships
- Self-organized, Self-managed, Self-reliant
- Socially strong
- Develops habits of a futurist

WHAT I LIKED AND WISH TO LEARN FROM....

- ✓ Personal qualities which are quite evident in children- self-discipline, confidence, honesty, teamwork, logic and reasoning, anticipation/guessing/ability to make predictions, communication, patience, etc. (although these qualities can be developed towards a higher stage but looking at most of existing schools, it's simply brilliant.)
- ✓ Both teachers and children are aware about established systems and processes of learning (UPLC, guided learning, finding examples related to concept being learnt, GRS, panchadik, dashadik, Am I able, discussion around jeevan vidya sutras, purpose behind creating different learning corners/themes on walls, role play etc.) I could clearly see shared vision and clarity in planning & instruction behind this success (for establishing good pedagogical practices like these...)
- ✓ Good listening and observation ability demonstrated by children during presentation/interaction/small or large group work. They were not interfering while someone else is speaking and simultaneously were able to contribute/add their thoughts when their friend was not clear while presenting about their classroom process/interacting with me or during group work in class. (and everything was being done in a natural/organic way).
- ✓ Students have taken ownership of their learning. They were eager to learn, participate in peer review processes and authenticate their learning with the help of their peers/teacher.
- ✓ Children were able to articulate their thoughts. (I could see a clear connection between their knowledge/ideas and the way they were expressing it with the help of examples/analogy).
- ✓ Children are able to tell and describe Jeevan Vidya related sutras. They have understood the basics and working on understanding it at a higher level.
- ✓ Teachers are humble and provide respect to students, they explained everything to me with same amount of respect, simplicity and honesty.

- ✓ It was nice to see contemporary knowledge being respected/acknowledged along with teaching/studying universal truth. (Studying theories and data provided by scientists along with studying Jeevan Vidya/Madhyastha darshan).
- ✓ This school has simplified deep philosophical concepts in a unique manner. It was simply amazing to see class 6 children concepts like 'tanha' and 'thirst' during discussion on religion and ideas.
- ✓ Providing multiple stimuli, smartly removing filters, hindrances & inhibition (encouraging the students to understand and communicate without initially worrying about technicalities, being authentic and natural in expression) in a foreign language has worked.

About the author-



Rovin Pushp is a former Resource Person –Azim Premji Foundation & Vision India Fellow. He has also worked as a consultant for multiple non-profits & schools. He has travelled across India to understand education & schools - their philosophy, values, management, pedagogy, etc.