

School Report

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Training to be better humans

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Kolkata: 'Being Human', a workshop series was conducted by the Tehelka Foundation over a three-day period from July 6 to

8 at Apeejay School, Park Street. The event was held by the Apeejay Education Trust under the aegis of Apeejay Surrendra Group. Fifty randomly selected students from Classes IX to XII underwent 'humanism training' to better their relationships with family, friends and teachers, and to focus on rediscovery and expression of core human values. The two-four hour sessions were conducted by Puneeta Roy, the executive director of the Tehelka Foundation, who incorporated a range of activities for students to break out of their shells and relate to each other.

With the initial embarrassment that comes with being called upon in public, the students took time to warm up to each other and the first session involved individual meditation and ice-breaking by having the different members interact and then introduce each other to the rest. Although not all introductions were successful as personal jabs like 'He's too friendly' and 'She likes food, as you can see' flew around, Roy gently intervened and said, "It's not a judgement on who you are. It shows how you are seen by other people."

Over the next two days, the students were taken into deeper meditation and creative visualisation of their own peaceful space, after which they expressed their thoughts on paper through creative writing and drawing exercises. They discussed core human values such as gratitude, humility, respect and love to understand the concepts without always being politically correct. Groups of them role-played these concepts in skits with a message. Mirror exercises in pairs and relating to each other with non-verbal actions aimed to break barriers of age and gender.

"When I told the students of the workshop, they asked me if they had been chosen because they were considered 'less human' and I had to reassure them it was a random selection," said principal Reeta Chatterjee, explaining their initial hesitation. "However, I have been evaluating them over the workshop period and there has been a nice

rounding of the edges. Difficulties in understanding themselves, their friends and the way they are looked at by others have been made clear."

"Whenever we make a mistake we excuse ourselves that we are just 'being human'", said Jannardhan Ghosh, the cultural coordinator. "This concept is more than an alibi. I think it is the beginning of a journey."

The students will undergo a second phase of workshops in August, spread over five days with two days spent at Shantiniketan. Tehelka Foundation's aim is to set up an interaction with the children of a local NGO there, to understand them and offer assistance. "This is an elite school and children here are in a protected bubble," said Puneeta Roy. "The Tehelka Foundation aims at social equity and we've found that such interactions act as a good leveller for both sides. The second phase will allow the students to apply the concepts to the environment around them."

At the end of this training, students will become ambassadors of the concept of 'Being Human', and train others in carrying out their concepts. Roy aims to create a national network across cities of such students. "We're looking at you as being agents of change," Roy told the group.

The workshop left the students satisfied and enchanted with the manner of their trainer. "She was a friend to us," said Jayashree Swaminathan of Class IX. "I'm going to miss the sessions. We realised the way we react, talk and mistreat some people. I'd like to share what I've learnt with everyone."

"We won't get this in classes, or in any other book", said Sailesha Jalan of Class X, while Gaurav Walia chimed in, "No other workshop I've been to has ever been like this. It was amazing to meditate together."

"The nine-ten girl who attended were more independent and emotionally mature than the boys. However, at the end of the workshop I noticed that a lot of boys have dropped their need to be 'cool' and conform to peer pressure. They walked out a lit-

tle taller and with more confidence, said Roy at the end of the session. "I love working with young people at this age," she added with a smile. "They have a mix of idealism and cynicism. They challenge you and you can challenge them back."

Pic: Jayanta Bhattacharyya

