



MENTORING ABILITY

Ms. Suvina Shunglu

An alumna of La Martiniere for Girls, Lucknow, Mrs. Suvina Shunglu did her Post Graduation in History from Lucknow University and her Teachers' Training at Loreto House, Kolkata. Mrs. Shunglu has an administrative experience of 12 years along with 15 years teaching experience in Kolkata, during which she also held the position of Middle School Coordinator after which she was charged with the responsibility of setting up Sri Sri Academy, a new co-educational school in the heart of Kolkata. As a Founder Principal of SSA, Mrs. Shunglu has been involved in the planning since its inception in 2009. Sri Sri Academy's credo is to "deepen the roots and broaden the horizons" of its students. In 2015, she was given the honour and responsibility of being an Academic Auditor by the Academic Council of the Sri Sri

Ravishankar Vidya Mandir(SSRVM) Trust. A firm believer in leading her team by example, Mrs. Shunglu is highly motivated and sensitive to the needs of students and her team. She helps them to build a strong foundation from which they can grow to be active, lifelong learners. In this interview with MENTOR, Mrs. Shunglu takes the readers through her experiences and journey as a teacher and a leader.

Share with us your childhood memories. Reflect and comment on education during your times. Growing up in the city of Lucknow, in a family with four siblings was fun. I have very happy memories of my childhood. Vacations were spent playing with cousins, swimming, cycling to nearby parks, circuses, picnics and climbing trees, especially our guava tree in the garden. Another happy childhood memory is of "stories with sounds". My father was a geologist who narrated stories which would draw us in as characters in the story and which unwound with a lot of sound effects. My childhood was simple and endearing.

School life was very formal and strict. Discipline was the norm. I loved organizing school events, was the school captain and was also a part of the basketball team. I loved attending my classes.

Challenges faced at work. Balancing work and family life.

Being extremely driven and focused on my work, I have often wondered if I managed to do justice to both. My husband, two children, and the extended family of husband's parents and my parents have all been supportive and appreciative of my commitment. When women work, their priorities become

crystal clear; the guiding light for their life. The extended family of friends, colleagues and neighbours too, at times pitched in to provide nets of caring support. The only times that get sacrificed are the 'me time' and 'spouse time' as one rushes to balance both family and work. Having said that, I only took on the responsibility of setting and heading a school





when my children had become young adults and needed less of my time.

Personal take on a child's education and future.

The purpose of education is apparently to prepare us for life, equip us with skills and knowledge to handle the world in which we will exist. Additionally, education is also meant to create awareness of the changing needs of the world, social skills to work and live together, the ability to handle failure and finally for self-knowledge. In a world where job-packages, university cut-offs, ability to pay for education and Ivy league dictate decisions, education has become a passport to a cushy life style, an elitist metamorphosis and a social statement. No one really thinks about value-based education or education for citizenship and our commitment to improving the lives of others in the world and so using education for meaningful development. This is the focus area at Sri Sri Academy which makes the school different.

What according to you is the purpose of education?

Information is not education. It is culturing our behavior and attitude. It is our responsibility to perceive things better. Only an education that nourishes inherent virtues can impart true intelligence. Since a healthy body best supports a sound mind and spirit, creative sports and ancient practices as meditation and yoga which bring self-awareness are a part of a child's learning process. In a nutshell, education must address all aspects of life including the aspect of spiritual growth.

Tell us about a recent book you read or a recent film that inspired you and your key takeaways as

a school leader from it?

A recent book I just completed reading was *What Can I Give?* by *Srijan Pal Singh* on the life lessons from his teacher, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. It is a tribute to his teacher and full of deep meaningful messages for any educator.

The author leaves a cushy corporate job with BCG and stays back to become an intern and adviser to the former President of India. This defining moment was the crucial thread running through the book and very synonymous to our Founder's philosophy who continuously tells us to aim high and find ways to give back to society and our country through Seva or service.

Learning and what it means to you...

Cultivating and practising leadership skills, being updated with technology, learning and updating myself through training programmes and workshops and using every opportunity to continue learning. I attended the Howard Gardner India Tour, Delhi Talk on Multiple Intelligence and Child Centered Education, the Executive Education Programme at Indian Institute of Ahmedabad on Strategic Leadership for Schools in a Changing Environment, the

SSRVM Trust Meet in Bangalore to synergise all schools under the trust among many others. I have also been a part of the Chinese Exchange Programme for the Principals held in China. We keep organizing tours in our school. We recently organized a tour to Australia with a team of students to attend workshops on newer fields of study and to interact with university Staff and teachers. These events, workshops, seminars, help you broaden horizons and learn more about the world.

The key highlights of my interaction with teachers and staff at the beginning of each session are:

- I revisit the vision and mission of the Founder to synergise and integrate personal goals with Institutional goals.
- The values which we wish to inculcate in our students must first shine through in ourselves only then would it be relevant to students and parents alike. I try to encourage in them a feeling of belongingness and ownership of the school. This is primarily through sharing plans, addressing concerns, proposing solutions to earlier issues and announcing new proposals.
- Developing leadership and mentoring ability is also a





key focus. This is often done by asking my team members to relate an incident that we appreciate. Highlighting efforts and initiatives taken by teachers and staff is important in building self-worth in teachers. Focusing on the positives while recognizing the shortcomings is a standard practice in our school.

How would you groom teachers/ staff to become leaders of tomorrow?

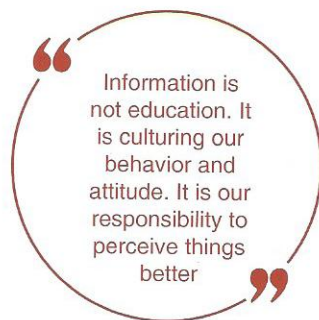
Grooming teachers to become leaders of tomorrow is first by creating awareness of new and progressive practices and by encouraging participation in conferences, workshops and being aligned with teacher groups and initiatives in education.

Peer-mentoring and micro teaching sessions also prepare them to evaluate others and give objective feedback.

Secondly, reflection, specifically in relation to our current school practices and curriculum. Analysing methods and practices leads us sometimes to review the benefits of what we do and helps us to change. Introduction of new practices is often based on either self-reflection or feedback from parents or staff.

Lastly, in house training for professional courses for

technology updation, skill and enquiry based training, blended learning are organized during the summer holidays and working Saturdays.



“Information is not education. It is culturing our behavior and attitude. It is our responsibility to perceive things better”

What are the key challenges that you go through as a Principal/ School Leader and how would you overcome those? What is the role of the trust in the school's daily activities?

Principalship has long been described as a challenging position. Being a Founder Principal who has set up the school for the first time, launched it and has been responsible for its growth and statutory compliances for the last eight years, has been a journey full of amazing experiences and wonderful learning. Challenges have been aplenty but nothing will stop me till I gradually implement the vision of the Founder to make Sri Sri Academy into a safe, creative,

caring and progressive school.

However, the foremost challenge I have faced is the paucity of time in building systems and processes in school administration, academic systems and meeting all norms, while putting together a school team of talented and committed members. Another serious challenge school principals are facing is, balancing the attitudinal divide between veteran teachers and newcomers.

The school trust has a representative and members of the Core Committee who meet once a week at the school and guide us and give us a fresh perspective on school policies. The Founder's vision of a value-based and stress free Education has found a resonance in all schools and is our guiding principle.

What are the activities that students engage in? What is their relevance/ importance in their development?

Every child is gifted with an innate skill or ability. SSA provides a sound platform to nurture such talent and give each child the room to grow and learn. The morning begins in school for each child with twenty minutes of Yoga, circle time, meditation and pranayama after a morning





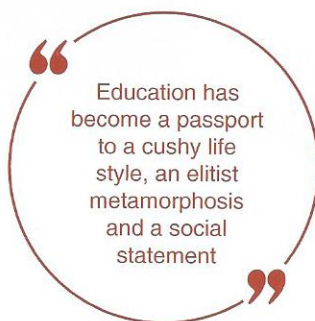
prayer. Academics is coupled with Games, Library, Activity time and excursions to give an all-round school experience and nourish multiple intelligences. All students from the age of 8-14 participate in a fun, interactive and process based workshop which instill values and create self awareness. These are called the Art Excellence Programme and the Youth Empowerment Seminars organized by the Art of Living Teachers trained specially by the Trust.

We believe that each child is unique. Ours is an inclusive school where all the students are accepted.

- We provide for special education and are equipped with the infrastructure for those who are physically challenged. We stress the importance of taking time out for reflection, mentoring, and parent orientation.
- We reward academic and non-academic achievements, including those of personal development. We nurture our students' identities as Indians, emphasizing simplicity and modesty in dress, participation in cultural events, and the

exemplification of the best of our values.

- An inclusion policy has been implemented and those who show signs of learning disabilities are tested with the consent of parents and special educators. Special teacher developed equipment and worksheets are used for differentiated learning and prepared and stored in our resource rooms.



How has the teaching learning process changed from your times to now? How do you/ the school meet the current needs of students?

Academics in those days was very knowledge-oriented and revolved around text books. However, modern teaching and progressive methods used in

our school, rely on a hands-on approach, virtual experiments and technology to create interest in subjects especially those that are research-based. Teaching Literature and Social Sciences is still personality-oriented, though we do try and bring in plenty of visits to museums, film-viewing, panel-discussions, interviews, talks and project work. Language-development is priority through plenty of story-telling sessions, and fun activities like Just-a-Minute, Elocutions, Debates and Seminars and MUNS at the later stage.

Differentiated learning is being experimented with remedial support and enrichment provided to students with varying abilities. All class-teachers are trained to be mentors and provide pastoral care. We also have a full time counsellor who helps guide students with emotional and behavioural concerns.

How does the school infrastructure and the latest tangible deliverables offered by the school meet the demands of students today?

Ours is the first state of the art academy of the SSRVM Trust.



Located in the heart of Kolkata, the school campus spreads over an area of 1.5 acres. It houses classrooms which are air-conditioned, spacious and filled with natural light. All the classrooms are equipped with Smart Boards. The furniture and teaching aids are of an international standard. The play areas comprise a multi activity-AMAZON for tiny tots, an indoor mini-gym, 2 multi-purpose halls for group performances, an open paved courtyard for yoga, dance and music rooms, a basketball court, badminton courts, table tennis tables and an open playground. Special care has been taken for physically challenged children with the building of ramps and other needful amenities. The premises are safe, clean and hygienic and is well equipped.

What are the key values that a school/ institute must instill in students? What are the other spaces to learn?

We invest in the intellectual and holistic development of our students and seek to provide them with opportunities and experiences to discover their true potential. Further, we emphasize the core values that are integral to our school and should be recognized as an indispensable part of its culture. We nurture each student's personality and academic achievements and reward both academic excellence and positive attitudinal change. Opportunities are provided for students throughout the year to participate in performing arts, sporting activities and inter school competitions thereby providing an active platform for growth. We emphasize an Indian identity and traditional roots in dress, dance, and culture while adopting the Western values of punctuality, courtesy, hygiene, and professionalism. We

emphasize the need for service, compassion, friendliness, mutual courtesy and considerateness. Consumerism is a way of life that ultimately depletes; we wish to encourage simplicity in our children's approach to life, in their celebrations, and even in their choice of apparel. We wish them to possess joy in who they are and in the good goals they attain, rather than in what they possess and purchase. We treasure the development of each student's independent-minded, and ethical personality. We strive to nurture students who set new and positive trends rather than blindly following in the paths of others.

How does the school deal with cultural exchange programs and ideas across the globe?

We truly believe in and follow internationalism and inclusion so that no group or individual feels left out. Activities and events are developed to include all stake holders. SSA organized its first inter school SSMUN 2016 which was attended by 10 schools. Every class is responsible for school assemblies that portray concerns involving the community, the environment, the nation, the world and focusing on nurturing humanism. Skyping with partner schools in Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Zimbabwe, Poland and the United Kingdom is a regular affair. Exploring different cultures and countries helps nurture diversity in students and develop adaptiveness.

The other most important example would be to nurture respect for the environment and to make it a school that cares. We commit wholeheartedly to being environmentally responsible – in not just words but deeds.

What is the one thing that you would like to/are trying to

introduce in the school blending with the latest trends so that students may be prepared for challenges of tomorrow?

The latest value additions in terms of infrastructure as planned for the school includes the following:

- A Design and Technology Lab coming up in the session 2017-18 to build hands-on-skills in Middle School students leading to innovation. Teachers are being trained by an Australian trainer who works with the best known design school in Sydney according to the Technological Studies curriculum in Australia.
- Senior Cafeteria to provide healthy food for the middle and senior school students who stay in the school premises for longer hours. A tie up with a start up to deliver freshly made and balanced meals in school is on the anvil.
- Prayer / Meditation Room, which will be a serene and quiet room where anyone can meditate or pray or reflect.
- Multi-Purpose Hall: A two storied multipurpose hall with infrastructure for indoor basketball, cricket nets, badminton and table tennis and a stage with wings and the latest acoustics have been planned for cultural and social events and assemblies. With almost four months of rainy weather in the city of Kolkata, this has been a necessity, to help the students to have their games classes regularly.

What is that one strong belief you have and what is the message you would like to give to fellow educators/ institutions in the making

I feel in the pursuit of building a value-based institution, I have had the courage of my convictions and have followed



my dreams. The two most profound examples of inspired learning would be my personal belief in my Founder's Vision. All my processes and initiatives are based on his Mission for the school. I truly believe in all initiatives that I introduce in the school, for my students, staff and teachers, parents and make sure I apply and follow the same rules of punctuality, attendance, decorum, dress, openness, humility and respect for all.

As educators, leaders, we must prepare students for the unforeseen and hence skill-based education and experiential learning are extremely important. We have become too closed. We need to be more accepting to change and that change begins from us. The seeds of change should be sown early.

'Life is the mother of learning!'
Your view?

Yes agreed. Life is also a platform where existing learning must be nurtured.

8th March is celebrated as International Women's Day. Your thoughts on the essence of being a woman...

In India, women culturally take the larger responsibility of home, children, in-laws and all family issues. Therein lies the great challenge of balancing work and family; of prioritizing and making choices and sacrifices. Secondly, women rarely get their due respect and it is normally attributed to a pretty face or a good personality.

Even as the head of a school, I have been the recipient of such remarks. However, I feel that women have the ability to strike the perfect balance between emotional and intellectual quotient.

tête-à-tête QUICK7

MENTOR in conversation with Ms. Suvina Shunglu

I would describe education as....
A lifelong process

You've attended several workshops both in India and globally. Give us 3 ways in which workshops/seminars help educators?

- Helps you stay connected with similar people
- Broadens perspectives, makes you progressive
- Serves as a platform to share ideas and experiences

What are the 3 qualities that schools can/should look at nurturing in students for them to be prepared for tomorrow?

- Human Values
- Updating with technology
- Diversity and inclusiveness

What are the 3 key qualities that educators/teachers must have/must build to connect with students today?

- Compassion
- Communication
- Emulating and being the perfect role model

You've said, a design and technology lab is upcoming in 2017-18. Give us one technological advancement in recent times that you think has changed the way in which children learn. Why is it important?

Robotics; software; application development.

Students have the power to think and to create. Our design

laboratory aims to utilize and nurture skills of students.

Balancing work and family life; what are the 3 things required to strike the perfect balance.

Fortunately for me, balancing was never a hiccup. I came into the profession after my children had already grown up. Today, I am fortunate that this profession helped me befriend so many individuals from diverse backgrounds. My children have so many people to look up to, those who could guide them.

Your biggest learning from life has been...

Accepting yourself the way you are! Being anxious never helps. I have learnt to be more calm in my approach to everything and that is something that I have learnt from my Guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

