



*IIMC CASE RESEARCH CENTRE (IIMCCRC)
ADITI BHUTORIA, BHASWATI MUKHOPADHYAY
MARCH 2022*

SAI INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL: IN PURSUIT OF ACADEMIC HAPPINESS

Sometimes what we read stays in an abyss of the mind for longer than we realize. Dr Bijaya Kumar Sahoo, a Chartered Accountant (CA) of repute was en route to work, after dropping off his two sons at the gates of one of the premier educational institutions in Odisha (India). Alone in the car with just the quiet hum of the engine for company, he was unexpectedly reminded of a few lines from Abraham Lincoln's letter to his son's headmaster. "Teach him to learn to lose...and also to enjoy winning. Steer him away from envy. If you can, teach him the secret of quiet laughter...teach him it is far more honorable to fail than to cheat...teach him to have faith in his own ideas, even if everyone tells him they are wrong."¹

That day at work, these lines haunted him repeatedly. That day was a good two decades ago. Dr. Sahoo realized where his sense of discomfort was — that school education was being imparted in a rather fragmented manner without a thought for a child's holistic development. "Education" as he saw it, was confined not just to the leaf of a book, but had its genesis in universal learning where the intrinsic values of life were intertwined. And that is why those lines from Lincoln's letter, that Dr Sahoo had probably read in his adolescence, still resonated with him.

1

http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/themes/5237775378c272642100002/attachments/original/1386601477/AbeLincoln_LetterToSon.pdf?1386601477#:~:text=Let%20him%20have%20the%20courage,fi ne%20little%20fellow%2C%20my%20son!

Prof. Aditi Bhutoria of the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta and Bhaswati Mukhopadhyay developed this case study as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate the effective or ineffective running of an organization or institution.

What then would holistic education be all about? What innovative pedagogies and shifts in practice are required to build such a comprehensive education system? Was education just about making the child academically wiser or was it about happy, healthy, and motivated children? Dr Sahoo kept coming back to these questions as he revisited his life as a student, the trials and tribulations, the desire to look beyond the textbook for transformational education. He wanted his sons and all other students to be future-ready citizens. He perceived a world where education itself would have its happiness quotient. What Dr Sahoo was really looking for was not so much a return on investment (ROI) from a financial perspective of the education that students like his sons were receiving, but more of a “value-based” ROI. He pondered whether real academics needed critical structural changes. As Dr Sahoo revisited that day, which was nearly 20 years ago, he thought about how he could be active in spearheading this change. Some questions bothered him; what could be the tenets of educational transformation at a school-level?; what should the role of teachers in this transformation be - from a testing-driven approach to a value-driven approach?; or should the school management play a significant role in this process of change, and if so, how can this change be mobilized?