

'RETHINKING EDUCATION' IN THE 21ST CENTURY

(Presented on the occasion of the 7th Annual Day on 13th February 2016)

Distinguished Chief Guest of this evening Dr. B Suresh, Chairman of Excel Education & E-Learning Trust, Prof. M H Dhananjaya, Secretary, Mr. D Sudhanva, Mr. H M Prashanth, the School Correspondent, Members of the School Managing Committee, invited Guests, dear Parents, members of the Staff and Faculty of Excel Public School and my dear children.

'An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man', said Ralph Waldo Emerson.

I stand here before you with a deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness to that ONE MAN, the single most important personality behind the existence of this School, a great visionary-educationist, a source of inspiration and motivation to all of us at the EPS family, Prof. M H Dhananjaya, the Chairman of Excel Education and E-Learning Trust. We revere him for his unconditional respect for the core human values he possesses and adore him for his exceptional leadership acumen and simplicity. I would be failing in my moral responsibility if I go on with my assigned duty of presenting the Annual Report, if I do not use this platform to express my deep-felt reverence and appreciation to him and to Mr. Sudhanva, on behalf of the students, their parents and all the members of the staff and faculty of Excel Public School for providing us a campus with unmatched and enviable facilities.

Lon Watters said, **"School is a building with four walls, and tomorrow inside"**.

Sir, you have given us the building, beautiful and aesthetically designed, equipped with unique facilities and state of the art infrastructure for teaching and learning to flourish. I, on behalf of my colleagues, parents and student community, promise you, that we shall fill it with tomorrow, a confident tomorrow, a self-reliant tomorrow, a creative and independent thinking tomorrow, a law abiding and socially responsible tomorrow, a tolerant tomorrow and, more importantly, a tomorrow of proud Indians capable of redefining the destiny of this nation.

Education breeds confidence. Confidence breeds hope. Hope breeds peace.

Confucius, Chinese philosopher (551-479 BC)

Seven years have gone by.....living and fulfilling the dream called 'Excel Public School'. From a small make-shift arrangement, beside Excelsoft to this magnificent campus, the journey has been very exciting and gratifying. What has materialized is evident in our students' lives, the way they think, speak and act. People may say EPS has arrived but all that we could accomplish in these few years, for me, is just the start. We are beginning to dig deeper and have a renewed vision of what we must accomplish for our younger generation, for our TOMORROW.

School Education is undergoing radical changes in this fast changing world. Attempts are being made all over the world to redefine education, going beyond mere literacy and numeracy and trying to focus on new learning environments and new approaches in teaching and learning. As parents, many of you would have felt this, many times, walking through this school campus, witnessing the various events and programmes and observing the innumerable ways in which our children can express and exhibit their learning. Educationists all over the world have started thinking seriously about the skills and competencies required for learners in the 21st century and pedagogies that are required to stimulate those skills and competencies. It is now generally being accepted that a quality basic education is the necessary foundation for learning throughout life in this complex and dynamic world.

Living in these times of transition, as an educator and as an institution, we constantly reflect and ask ourselves:

- What kind of education do we need for the 21st century?
- How can we take advantage of our curricular framework and 'go beyond' it to create 'future ready' citizens?

- How to organize learning in a formal school set up so that we can inculcate values in our children's hearts and not just educate their minds?
- How to make education meaningful and relevant so that our students walk out of school as 'ambassadors of change' to create a transformative impact?

As an effort to find answers to similar questions, the UNESCO recently published a document, titled **'Rethinking Education- towards a global common good'**. This document mainly touches upon four key aspects of education in the 21st Century.

- a) The paradigm shift in the purpose and methods of learning,
- b) Increased influence of digital technologies in education in the 21st century,
- c) Education as a humanistic process,
- d) Education as a means to Social Transformation.

I think it would only be relevant to share some of the findings mentioned in this document, and Excel Public School's preparedness to accept this global call for 'Rethinking Education'.

This document argues that in present context, learning has become less structured and more innovative as there is an easy access to diverse sources of knowledge. In this context, EPS' belief that most of the learning takes place outside classrooms and our motto that 'learning should go beyond classrooms and textbooks' hold more relevance and credibility.

As an educational institution, we strive hard to provide more scope for innovation, experimentation and exploration in both structured and informal contexts for students to develop their higher order thinking. As Sydney J Harris rightly said, **'the whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows'**. I am proud to say that the unmatched learning facilities created at EPS, in this new premises, would certainly facilitate this much needed 21st century learning model.

Opportunities offered by e-learning, mobile learning and other digital technologies have increased in the recent times and many people depend solely on these, to just stimulate the mind. But, these will never undermine the important role that schooling plays in one's life. Opportunities for socialisation beyond family brings great enrichment in students' lives and they effortlessly imbibe various virtues which will help them to lead a quality life.

We live in a connected world and digital connectivity has permeated every aspect of human lives, including education. Our children are the 'digital natives' and most of us sitting here are 'digital immigrants'. While digital technologies have revolutionised the teaching learning process, and hold great promise for future, they also raise important concerns, especially in terms of the 'information pollution', which is often misleading and misguiding for the young generation. In this new cyber world, educators and parents need to partner and prepare the new generations with sensitivity and sensibility. After all, they are the ones who would have to deal with the ethical and social dimensions of not only existing digital technologies but also those yet to be invented. Though I am proud that Excel Public School has become a trend-setter in the field of creating technology enabled learning environment, we never miss an opportunity to sensitise our parents and students about its potential harm and distraction. I would earnestly urge the parents to be more vigilant and exercise discretion while granting their children free access to technology. We need to protect them from the abuse, overuse and misuse of technology.

The UNESCO document strongly emphasizes the need for an integrated and humanistic approach to education, based on renewed ethical and moral foundations. It calls for an education process that is 'inclusive' and does not create or promote inequalities. I can say confidently that we are inclusive in the composition of the staff and student community, with no preferences to their caste, community, language, socio-economic status or standing. We celebrate these diversities as a community.

The famous words of Martin Luther King Jr., **'Intelligence with character- that is the goal of true education'**, are close to our hearts and we make every effort demonstrate the same. I am happy to mention

that EPS' efforts to develop a generation of morally sound and ethically upright young learners, with a sound civic sense and social responsibility, have borne fruit in the past and will continue in the days to come.

To quote eminent educationist John Dewey, **'Education is not preparation for life; it is life itself'**. At EPS, education is not about the acquisition of knowledge and skills alone, it is also about learning of values, values of respect for life and human dignity, much required for social harmony in a diverse world. But many a times, we reduce the purpose of education merely for employment? Quality education should fulfil its whole purpose - give adequate importance to preparation for life and citizenship along with preparation for employment and entrepreneurship.

In the words of Nelson Mandela, **"Education is the most important weapon which you can use to change the world"**. This has awakened many to the fact that education indeed, has a vital role to play in the development of capabilities required to effect social transformation. Using education as an agent for social transformation has been the essence behind various endeavours at EPS. With the eyes of faith, we can see and say that our students will effect that change one day.

We can say this with confidence because teaching learning process at EPS goes beyond academics to promote creative and critical thinking, societal and reflective thinking, ensuring that learning remains a lifelong process.....a process of discovering our true calling and leading purposeful lives, living not for ourselves alone but also to reach others.

This is vital because societies everywhere are undergoing a deep transformation, and this calls for new forms of education to foster the competencies that societies and economies need, today and tomorrow. So the role of teachers and parents is vital for developing confidence, independent judgement and problem solving skills, rather than unreflective conformity. We need to shift from looking at learning as a process of consuming information to generation of knowledge and new ideas.....encouraging our learners to dream, imagine and invent, not to just 'reinvent the same wheel' but realize their potential.

Increased engagement between the school and parent community is a must if we want to rethink and redefine education for our young generation. We need to collaborate more than ever to achieve these noble objectives of education. At EPS, we will continue to strive to create an attitude of respect and responsibility among our students towards various social institutions and ensure that our students take pride in being the citizens of this great nation. We shall continue to urge our students and staff to 'be the change' they want to bring about in this world.

John F Kennedy said, **'We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives'**.

Before I bring my thoughts to a close, let me place on record my sincere gratitude to all those who have helped us during this journey called 'the making of EPS'.

An enlightened management is the biggest asset of any educational institution and we are fortunate to have progressive visionaries, who selflessly strive for the growth of this institution as its promoters. I am grateful to all of them. **'Good leaders have vision and inspire others to help them turn vision into reality. Great leaders have vision, share vision, and inspire others to create their own'**. I would like to thank our beloved Chairman Prof. M H Dahanajaya, the great visionary, for being our guiding force, a true source of inspiration and direction to all of us.

'Leadership is the vision to provide direction and the strength of character to attract others who carry it out', said Ken Poirot. Mr. D Sudhanva, the Secretary of the Excel Education and E-Learning Trust is one such leader. He is both inspirational and transformational. Thank you Sir for being that wonderful source of succour and solace, to all of us, at all times, both good and not so good.

Khalil Gibran once said, **'generosity is giving more than you can, and humility is taking less than you deserve'**. This is very much true in the case of Mr. H M Prashanth, the Correspondent of Excel Public School. Thank you Mr. Prashanth for your generous support and unrelenting efforts to take EPS to newer heights of quality education.

My thanks also to all the members of the School Managing Committee, Heads, Managers and our colleagues at Excelsoft, especially the Administrative and Accounts Departments for their support and timely assistance.

Let me also make a special mention of all the members of the K-12 Team, Instructional Design Team, Activity Design Team, the Teacher Training division, and the Facilities Team, who always extend the most needed support to our parents, teachers and students.

To quote the words of the US President Barack Obama, **'a change is brought about when ordinary people do extraordinary things'**. My sincere thanks and appreciation to all my 'very ordinary' colleagues, both in the academic and co-academic fronts, who have been engaged in a constant endeavour to achieve extraordinary feats through our children. Thank you for garnering all your time and resources for the benefit of our children, and for to 'exceed the expectations'.

Our students and parents, who always stood by us, at all times, both good and bad have been our official spokespersons. They have been our constructive critics, benign guides and active supporters. As I always say, 'a school is for the students and not for the parents.' As a school, we have to make decisions, keeping the emotional well-being and intellectual growth of our students in mind. It is quite natural that, in this process, we end-up receiving criticism and brickbats from a few parents. As someone said, **'there is only one brilliant child in this world, and every parent has it'**. We have 1127 brilliant children on our roll, as on today, and making every one of their parents happy is impossible. Dear parents, we would continue to look forward to your support and guidance during the most exciting days ahead.

A parent rightly said, **'while we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about'**. Dear children, you have been our biggest assets, all through our journey. I thank all of you for your unconditional love for our school and for bearing testimony to our unique learning experience, and for upholding the values and principles that EPS stands for, day in and day out. Continue to believe in CHANGE and try to 'be the change'.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me end with my favourite quote from Albert Einstein, **'Education is what remains after one has forgotten what he/she has learned in school'**. EPS is not about teaching children, it is more about creating conditions for children to learn and allowing them to learn happily. Let's together give our children a childhood capable of making them learn life's biggest lessons, in the best possible ways.

- Let's be more interested in our children than their performance,
- Let's be a part of their world than expecting them to be active and alive in our world,
- Let's make them confident to share their dreams than thrusting our dreams on them,
- Let's encourage them to ask questions than giving answers blindly, and
- Let's not bother about spending our time, resources and energy **for them**, but let's spend it **with them**.

Thank you very much!!

EXCEL
public school



Mathew K G
(13th February 2016)