

# The Creativity Adda

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Written specially for Vikalp Sangam *Imagine a space where government school-going children have freedom to pursue and develop their interests everyday without textbooks, exams, or marks...where they collaborate with each other and undertake practical experiments...where they initiate real world projects and interact with diverse people around the city...where they are provided exposure and guidance into new and different ways of living holistically!* This kind of sounds like the school in the last scene of 3 Idiots. Since January 2015, one such space has been flourishing in the heart of old Delhi. This project, called The Creativity Adda, is being run in an all-boys government-aided school (classes 6-12) in Darya Ganj in the infamous Delhi-6. The project, initiated by Shikshantar Andolan, is based on the pedagogy of self-designed learning and draws inspiration from Gandhi's Nai Taleem, Tagore's Shantiniketan, democratic school movement, the unschooling movement/homeschooling and Swaraj University in Udaipur, Rajasthan which has been supporting young people to craft their own learning journeys. The objective of this 'unschool' is to give a daily space for kids to nurture intrinsic motivation, creativity, self-awareness, self-discipline, teamwork, confidence, and to explore a range of practical skills and new career options. To help them connect with their real selves, rather than losing their originality, core talents, dreams, and connections to their community and nature. Co-founder Ashish Tiwari says, "We believe that each student, by living a life guided by his creativity, passion and by collaborative relationships, will be more happy. This is what we are striving towards at the Creativity Adda. We want to support individuals who contribute to and make this world better by all their pursuits." He goes on to add, "We are also trying to nourish the seeds of social entrepreneurship. This is very important given the growing youth unemployment in our country." There is a strong attempt to challenge the dominant school monoculture of competition, compulsion, fragmented knowledge, I.Q. labeling, textbooks, and certification. At the Creativity Adda, every child is seen as 'intelligent' and peer-to-peer sharing and collaborating is a very powerful form of learning. Tiwari comments, "We trust the kids." The project envisions the infectious learning spirit of kids as the spark to bring a transformative change in the overall school culture.



There are 5 hubs in the Creativity Adda: the Slow Food Junior Chef's Academy and City Organic Farm, the Community Media Academy, the Designlab and Makerspace, the Music and Dance Studio, and the Sports and Fitness centre. Anywhere between 30-50 kids attend daily. The unschool functions everyday from 2-5pm and the kids are free to decide what they would like to learn. Tiwari says, "Having this kind of block of open time everyday is critical because gives kids the space to go into one area deeply and it allows them to explore different things more freely. Building a culture of dedication and practice is important." There is a team of independent facilitators for each of hub whose role is to co-host the space and to share different learning challenges. Interestingly, none of these facilitators has a B.Ed, some don't even have degrees. What they do have is a strong passion for their area and a willingness to listen to and co-create with children. It is the kids who take charge of their learning. Many of the activities have been initiated by the demand, enthusiasm and curiosity of the kids. The Creativity Adda also invites several resource persons from time to time to engage with the kids and give them exposure into other creative projects like filmmaking, ultimate frisbee, candlemaking, toy making, mime theatre, animation, roller-skating, building a drone, story-telling, graffiti painting, etc. The idea of behind this project is not just to expose the kids to different extra-curricular hobbies. Rather, the emphasis is actually on helping them see the full cycle of how they can take their learning to another level by bringing out a product or providing some service in the community. This methodology is called project-based learning and it's an essential part of experiential education. Engaging in the real world gives powerful feedback for learning. For example, the Labansh (class 8), Shashank (class 10), and Hemant (class 10) in the Slow Food Academy have learned more than 75 recipes over the past year. They are now helping to manage and run the Slow Food Darya Dil Café in their school which is organized two evenings a month for their families, friends and larger Delhi community.



The kids are directly involved in planning, set up, researching and cooking new recipes, and overall execution of the event. They now have a good idea of what all is involved in running a café. Mrs. Himanshu Kapoor, organic chef-founder of C.Green Foods and resource person from Slow Food India, describes, "Food – how we grow it, what seeds we use, our relationship with the farmer and what we put into our mouths– is a major theme for India but pretty much ignored in our education system. We are losing our diverse food cultures. It is urgent that we share this knowledge with the next generation." The kids learning music have formed their own band, Allahaad. In addition to performing at the Dariya Dil Café, they have performed at several avenues outside the Adda and have led drum circles at other venues. All of the learning hubs try to get the kids out of the classroom and into real-life situations. The kids also go on exposure trips, visit festivals and fairs as well as go for photo-walks in their neighborhood. Tiwari shares, "We want the kids to develop their roots and their wings. We also hope that kids can see that there are many amazing new ways to earn a livelihood and contribute to the well-being of their communities and environment."



In the Designlab and Makerspace, Moin, a student from class 9 who has the spirit of an inventor, recently attended a Drone Building workshop at the Adda. After the workshop, he came up with the idea that he would like to design the drone himself. He was really surprised that the drone costs so much (approximately Rs.15,000), so he decided to design a less expensive jugaad version using waste materials. He designed and built his own prototype within 5 days for about Rs.50. He yet has to make his drone properly fly but he is working towards that with great dedication. Moin has been invited by private schools around Delhi to conduct upcycling workshops using many different waste products. Tiwari shares, "We have many kids, like Moin, whose sister told us that he only comes to school because of the Adda. The factory-school environment doesn't understand them or support their various talents." After being in the Adda, his family is slowly starting to appreciate their little inventor, and now support him in keeping a little workshop in his house. Facilitator Vikram Singh says, "We believe the way to deal with struggling students is not to tighten them up with more tuitions as is happening all over our country. Rather, we must help them find what they are good at and what they love doing. This will increase their intrinsic motivation and improve their self-image." He shares the story of Yogesh (class 10), who is passionate about playing the Djembe African drum in the Adda band. When he failed 2 subjects in class 9, he father asked him to stop coming to the Adda and take more tuitions. Yogesh initially agreed for a few weeks. Then he slowly negotiated with his father to let him re-join the Adda. Now, he is working hard on his studies and finding time for his passion. His father is very

happy with him.

The Creativity Adda has witnessed palpable growth in many kids who have been regular in attending over the past year. The kids have opened up so beautifully in the last one year and their self confidence is much higher. They talk very freely with visitors at the Adda and also whenever they go outside to attend any events. They are gaining an awareness of what their interests are and how they can constructively take them forward in the larger world. They are re-connecting with their families and diverse experiences in their community. The non-competitive and non-judgemental space at the Adda gives them the freedom to try out several ways of doing a particular thing, make mistakes, learn, and then try again with some improvisations.



Tiwari remarks, "The project is trying to up new

frontiers for who we learn from, how we learn, where we learn, when we learn, what we learn. We are slowly gaining the trust of parents. It is exciting to see so many new possibilities opening up every day for the kids of Delhi-6." Visit their

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**The Creativity Adda recently completed its first year. Here is a little video made by some of the students. Here is also a link to the December 2015 newsletter of the Creativity Adda: <http://eepurl.com/bNaNBL> Contact [the author](#)**