# Self Organizing Learning Systems

## A Research Paper by Silver Oaks
## on
## Self and Peer Assessment As Learning Experiences
## October 2012

**Presented by**
**Seetha Murty   Principal**
**Silver Oaks   The School of Hyderabad**

## NOTE FROM SILVER OAKS

In the realms of education that we dwell in, all our efforts are to raise a class of young people who will create a better world.  Integrity and honesty are the aspirations we have for them. As a School we are striving to share our experiences with all those involved in educating people for a better world.

Our objective is to share and add to the knowledge pool.

We would be delighted to hear from those who appreciate our work and would like to use some of our design models in their realms of education.

Nothing can be more satisfying than the feeling that our experiences have come of use to someone somewhere.

## Credits

Ms Anuradha  ICT Coordinator Silver Oaks. She helped in designing the group sheets and individual sheets for peer assessment.

Ms Rachna Sharma Head Senior School. She helped in facilitating the process in the classrooms.

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**Abstract** This paper explains the evolution of self and peer assessment system in the school in a span of 4 years. The philosophy of the school and the CCE Continuous comprehensive evaluation system developed by the CBSE Central Board for Secondary Education India have been harmonised in this evolution of a self and peer assessment system of the School. Priorities of parents and students have also been refocused towards character development and social skills through this system of evaluation.

## School's Philosophy

 'Destiny of a country begins in it's classrooms' and a school has to assume the responsibility of nation building.

As a School, our vision is to groom young people who will live for a purpose, learn to apply, lead with determination and leave a timeless legacy.

And therefore we are working on an 'inside out approach with character first and competence next' as the focus.

 Easier said than done! It's a challenge between the school's ideology and contemporary trends in the society.

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## *Curriculum For Character Development*

Building character as the first priority in a school means designing a curriculum for character development. We identified attributes, attitudes as proposed by *IB learner profile in the Junior school and 7 Habits of Highly Effective people in the senior school. Gandhian principles, some policies and programs of the school were designed to consolidate our character curriculum.

In all curricular and co -curricular areas, frequent reference to 7 habits is done to get the students on board. Many policies and practices have been woven into the school environment to bring in congruence with our inside out approach.

The time was right to assess our curriculum and who better than the students themselves!

## *First Step Towards Self- Assessment: 2008 March*

With the conviction that reflection and introspection are great tools in self- assessment, each grade level students were gathered in the conference hall and detailed discussions on all the areas of character and competence that were achieved during the year were discussed. The School Principal moderated these discussions and invited their focus on achievements in character and competence.

A report card was designed for students to assess themselves in these areas. Discussion Sessions focussed on 7 habits, attitudes and actions as defined in the school house and academic achievements.

To some extent it helped the students to reflect , introspect and grade themselves.

[Pls click here to view the self assessment document1](#)

[Pls click here to view the self assessment document2](#)

## *Stumbling Blocks*

However it had only school's stamp and not the 'Board' stamp, which effectively meant that parents gave a cursory glance to these areas and an extensive study of the curricular areas in the report card.

This was largely the case with the students too. The sessions in self- assessment had a temporary effect. Also it was done at the end of the academic year therefore it was not a consistent practice to self-assess.

In a society where anything in printed and stamped form from a government body is more important, it is almost difficult to create the' urgent and important feel' to self-assessed character certificate.

## *Consistent Efforts*

In the Junior school, we have the *IBPYP ( International Baccaulerate Organization Primary years Program)  where the attributes and attitudes as defined in the learner profile are almost treated as sacrosanct in child development. Having built the importance of learner profile in all curricular areas, we found it easy to establish our inside out approach.

It is relatively easy to impress upon the students between 3 to 11 age groups regarding the importance of positive social skills but when it comes to age groups between 12 to 16, it becomes a mildly tedious task as age related distractions and frivolous habits take over their attitudes.

Their willingness to attend to subject related time is largely for 'top or decent grades'. Expecting them to personally work on their own attitudinal growth is an uphill task.

As adults we can see the future and what it holds for these young people when they grow up to be adults. But as young people, they still live in their own myopic world of 'life is today'.

If we allow young people to get carried away by their own myopic view of life or believe that work means 'studying for the next day's test', it would be an alarming future for both us and them.

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## CBSE  Introduces Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation    October 2009

At this juncture CBSE introduced CCE and the 'government stamp' to the importance of character building. Scholastic and Co Scholastic areas for evaluating the students have been specified. Grading scales and the processes were intimated.

Resonance between school's philosophy and the country's education system could be seen with CBSE's aspiration to make positive attitudes as essential part of evaluation.

Until now, it was our sole responsibility to spread this awareness that character building is in fact more important than helping the students master the static facts in textbooks.

With CBSE giving it 60% of space in the 100% of a student's evaluation, we got the official stamp to consolidate our ethos.

When 180 descriptors under various categories like, social skills, attitudes towards school, teachers, classmates and country were added as part of evaluation, we began to thrive. Because, cultivating consciousness towards these said categories is not easy in a society where increasing importance to grades is given.

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## Our Challenge:

- How to align the school's character curriculum and CBSE's list of 172 descriptors?
- How to do justice in assessing a student's attitude?
- How can one or two teachers assess a student in so many areas throughout the year?

Our belief was, if the students do not know what they are being evaluated for, the importance of it will remain as aloof to them as the purpose of learning.

Therefore we felt that they should know what they are being assessed for.

We made them read all the descriptors and conveyed to them that they will be observed for these traits. We displayed them in all classes and prominent areas.

 Discussions and **displays** did not convince us that we are on the right path.

We expected them to work towards improvement of those skills and attitudes. But the age they are in did not believe in consistency and the distractions are too attractive.

The impact of that was seen for a few days only. To contain their involvement in consistent attitude development, we began to think further.

Students felt that the teachers will invariably award them with good grades as they would not like their class to be underrated. Teachers felt that it is impossible to do justice to everyone with 180 descriptors considering the time and pressure of work.

## 2010 April  Our New Challenge

- How will this evaluation in co-scholastic areas help in character building?
- How can we turn these descriptors into teaching/learning tools rather than testing tools?
- How do we create process where students go through these descriptors repeatedly and evaluate themselves?
- How can we involve students in their learning and assessment of their attitudes?

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## Character First   Competence Next

As a school that believes in character first competence next, we had to find a way to use the 'CCE system' for enhancing the human capital in our classrooms.

A teacher may evaluate her student based on what she observes but how does this guarantee the development of these attitudes and skills if it is done in the remote spaces of a staffroom? Moreover, she cannot possibly observe them at all times.

Considering the demands of everyday work, it is not reasonable to expect the teacher to do justice in evaluation. Typically, a teacher might just mark 'A' or 'B' or a 'C' to complete the formality. None of these practices help the child develop these attitudes.  On the extreme side, a 'B' or 'C' grade might discourage him to disregard such attitudes.

As a school, we believe in 'catch them while doing the right' approach, not the opposite.

During discussions with other schools, we discovered that this system was deemed as a burden than a tool to work on student development.

It is easy to give some grades and fulfil the formality of a system prepared by the CBSE. But the philosophy of the school and the objectives behind the National reforms will have to be discarded, which was not acceptable.

Brain storming sessions led to intense research on a consistent and congruent system.

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## *Idea Inspired By A TED Talk*

Prof Sugata Mitra's TED Talk on 'Self Organized Learning Systems' was frequently viewed in the school in a different context.

After listening to him talk about how students are learning on their own by organizing the information before them in their mind, with an example from Tamilnadu, an idea began to take shape.

( *particularly the case of Tamil speaking children in rural Tamilnadu learning the biotechnology lesson in English- completely by themselves through repeated viewing of the video on their computer installed by Sugata Mitra in their village and perhaps mutual discussions on the topic,* )

Repeated viewing of a material with a purpose and group discussions to understand it can make people learn by themselves. Each one in the group will assimilate the intended material in his/her own way which will lead to some amount of understanding and learning.

This concept of 'Self Organizing Learning Systems' appeared to be a very appropriate process of using the 180 descriptors of CCE's co scholastic areas.

If studied, each descriptor is a provocation to the mind leading to questions on the evidence of such attitude or skill.

We explored on the possibility of children developing these attitudes and skills through 'Self Organizing Learning Systems'.

We have peer group learning, correction and discussions as an integral part of the learning environment and therefore peer assessment can also be facilitated.

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## *Our Premise*

On the premise that discussing the attitudes and skills in a peer group and assessing themselves on the rating scale will lead to imbibing these traits, we embarked on our journey of 'SOLS'.

A bridge between self - assessment and peer assessment has been created. Students will evaluate themselves in groups of 4 or 5 with a master sheet of attitudes/skills printed on it. Each descriptor is read aloud followed by a discussion on how they possess that skill.

**Pls click here to view master sheet and assessment grid**

## *Introspection*

The advantage here is that, no student can pretend or lie because he knows that he is most observed by his classmates than his teachers or parents. In fact, most of the young people are clueless about what traits they should possess to have a strength of character.

Owing to their age, they would not like to hear about it from adults. While reading the social/thinking skills or attitudes and their descriptors, they began to discover the essence of character evolution. We educated the students on the importance of introspection and self - assessment and also on unbiased opinions.

There were doubts on the judgement of students, misrepresentation of self or friends, favouring friends or bullying for better grades. But when we looked at it practically, in a teacher's assessment students may remain completely remote in their evaluation. There is neither learning nor introspection. Believing that introspection and discussion of these attitudes will lead to character development, we trust the students to assess themselves through their own lens and their friend's.

To eliminate any group nexus, we regroup them for every session of 'SOLS'.

We planned a calendar for 'SOLS' where every section is done twice a year. This helped in revisiting the attitudes and skills and the development of these traits in a school year.

**Pls click here to view assessment report**

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It is 2 years since we have been practising 'SOLS'. There is a considerable improvement in the conduct and actions of our students. They talk about helping themselves or their friends in working on their weak areas and celebrating their strong points.

They are ready to share with teachers and visitors about the process of their personality evolution and evaluation. In fact they are finding these descriptors as the jigsaw pieces that are coming together to reveal the secret to the puzzle of 'self enhancement'.

## *Tangible Outcomes*

A formal evaluation system developed by the Central Board for Secondary Education has been-

- A consistent process of self, group and peer assessment amongst 600 teenagers
- Utilized meaningfully as a teaching and learning tool
- A constructivist approach towards self enhancement
- Designed to achieve the desired goals of the national reforms
- Successfully customized to realize the philosophy of the school
- Meaningful discussions amongst students regarding values and skills

## *Intangible Yet Tangible Outcomes*

- Camaraderie and fraternal relationship between students
- Improved social skills
- Increased importance to excellence
- Empathetic relationships between students
- Peer encouragement and support
- Students' honest acceptance of their own weaknesses and sincerity towards overcoming them
- Open minded climates within classrooms
- Non pretentious attitudes in students
- New perspectives and opinions on evaluation, personality development and skills.
- Acknowledgement by parents regarding the importance of value generation and skill development in their children.

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## *Principals From Other Schools  Visit  To See SOLS In Action*

Once we were sure that this is a successful practice, we invited Principals of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan schools of BHEL and Jubilee Hills Hyderabad to visit the classrooms during the sessions on 'SOLS'.

In December 2011 Mr Ramahanuman of BVB BHEL spent a few hours discussing the process and outcome with the students. He was visibly impressed and convinced that this system can enhance the student's development. He recommended that it should be showcased and shared in National Conference of CBSE Schools' Principals.

In January 2012 Mrs Rama Devi of BVB J Hills visited the SOLS sessions along with her team of senior teachers and found this process extremely interesting and useful.

## *A Movie Made By Acorns Of Silver Oaks On SOLS*

[Pls click here to view the Movie](#)

Sincere efforts were made to present this paper in the conference but due to lack of time and prior reservation of time slots by Technology Solution Providers and Guest Speakers, this could not be shared.

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## *Academic Honesty*

In all sincere learning environments, academic honesty is given great importance. To give credit to those idea makers, writers, authors, artists and actors is an essential value of appreciation and respect.

Silver Oaks The School of Hyderabad welcomes schools that are interested in developing congruent practices in student's progress to use this system of SOLS.

The team @ Silver Oaks is ready to share this worthy practice with all those who are inclined towards value generation through education.

The school welcomes teams from other schools to understand the working of SOLS and see the work in progress.

In keeping with the spirit of academic honesty, it would be our honour if due credit is given to Silver Oaks The School of Hyderabad.

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