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All the students attached their chromatographic glass tubes into their respective clamp stands. Some knocked off the conical flask in the art of fixing it into the clamp stand. The aim was to check the point at which phenolphthalein turned light pink. Everybody missed the shot the first time, but the best part was that everybody knew what they had to do; only nobody knew why they were doing it! The priority had become waiting for the point at which the solution turned light pink. It didnâ€™t matter whether we knew any more than that or not. The idea was to pass in the practical exam.

Nobody including the teacher knew which scientist performed this experiment first and for what joy? Or was the scientist in search of something else before he tripped over this by serendipity? The Biology practicalâ€™s were worse. Fix the motionless chloroformed animal and go dissecting it right till the vestibular veinâ€¦nowâ€¦no doubt, in the long run it definitely will help me sharpen my surgical skills if I were to become a surgeon but what if I didnâ€™t? I would have landed up crippling 1 pigeon, 1 lizard, 1 earthworm in an entire academic year.

Letâ€™s take a look at the physics practicalâ€™s for a change. Struggle till you get the measurement of an ordinary aluminum cylindrical cone using a pair of â€œVernier Callipersâ€•. Bring the callipers closer and closer till you squint. 0.1111111111111 mili micron. Now where else would I use such a unit?  While buying clothes? No, food? No, while measuring astronomical distances? Yesâ€¦. But how many even manage to get into astronomical institutes? Hardly a few! Then whatâ€™s the point of teaching children practical sessions that donâ€™t have much of an impact in our dealing and understanding of the outside world? Instead, how much better it would be to have â€œRoboticsâ€• or artificial intelligence is a part of the childrenâ€™s science practicalâ€™s at school.

What if the animal closest to man were cut up studied for biology practicalâ€™s? What if children were taken to the school terrace to watch the sky by day or by nightâ€¦.to identify new constellationsâ€¦. What if children were taught the basics of pipetting and blood diagnostics for biology, wouldnâ€™t practicalâ€™s come closer to life than what it is like now? Distant and difficult to understand! only to be mugged and produced on sheets of paper for the exams to get an A on your score card even if you copied from another student the rest of the year.

Its high time we looked at the way practical sessions were being conducted. Better still if the syllabi for the practicals were revised. Practical sessions must be taken in small batches of 5 or 10 students at a time to allow ample space for all to see. It is important for the teacher to begin with the name of the experiment, followed by the Name of the scientist, a bit of the history, the studentâ€™s aim, the equipment and chemicals used, the steps, and what to expect. Precautions and possible errors must also be made mention of. This completes the practical for the day and thatâ€™s the best way to teach children the importance and value of conducting a practical.

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