“Testing all of our distinctively diverse students the same way, and killing their individuality!”

I run a programme called IDIA (Increasing Diversity by Increasing Access to Education), where we pick up underprivileged children from various parts of India, and train them for admission to the elite national law schools. The idea was to bust the bastions of privilege at the top law schools and bring in more diversity into the classrooms.

How better to do this than through legal training—for almost all our political leaders in the pre-independence era were trained in the law. Unfortunately, many of our leading law schools do not train their students for this kind of leadership. Alumni who now occupy the top echelons of legal power in the country do so by default, not by design. Our law schools are content with simply ticking off the formal “compliance” boxes of the BCI (Bar Council of India) and the UGC and creating “technically skilled” lawyers—those employable in large numbers by corporate commercial India, but failing to vest them with any sense of purpose or macro level vision to take their place as true leaders and change-makers!

A quote that is famously attributed to Einstein (though wrongly so) goes thus: “Everybody is a Genius. But If You Judge a Fish by Its Ability to Climb a Tree, It Will Live Its Whole Life Believing that It is Stupid.” And yet this is precisely what we do in schools - testing all of our distinctively diverse students the same way, and killing their individuality!

Outside of schools, the biggest killers of creativity are parents and family—who put enormous pressure on their children to earn high marks and become doctors and engineers. Or join multinational companies in safe secure jobs that command big salaries and even bigger premiums in the marriage market. Speak about entrepreneurship and start-ups to your parents—and you’re sure to be booted out of home! Even in law, we suffer this creativity deficit.

How then do we create more lateral thinkers? For this, we need less “thinking” and more “imagination”. As George Bernard Shaw once quipped: “You see things as they are, and ask: why? I dream things that never were and ask: why not?”