Live, learn, grow... all in a gap

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ALL IN A YEAR'S WORK:
Dev A Raichura, a 19-year-old from Coimbatore, used his gap year to volunteer and learn video editing

As students grapple with the pressure of board exams, there's another crossroads waiting to be met – what next? With hundreds of options to choose from, for a gene ration of students growing more discerning and ambitious by the day, the concept of a gap year seems no more a luxury, but a resourceful period to put things in perspective.

Espec ially since the pandemic, which taught everyone, both young and old alike, that it is okay to pause and reset.

Which is why Dev A Raichura, a 19-year-old from Coimbatore, decided to start his gap year by focusing on his mental health. "After that pause, I started to focus on skilling up," he says. Dev' s parents were nervous about his decision and made him apply to universities.

"I got in, but refused to go," says Dev who was determined to do a gap year. "I became a regular volunteer at an NGO and finished an online course in video editing which I couldn't do during my school days due to academic pressure," he says. Dev earned his first income during his gap year by becoming a social media video editor for a business personality. "I dev eloped more skills in my gap year than I could have if I joined college. Though I'm applying to college this year, I'm willing to take more gaps as it redefined my life. "

In fact, with m ore students warming up to the idea of gap years, in the last couple of years, institutions have come up which focus on helping students skill up. Rishihood University, for instance, has introduced a formal gap year programme called Anvesha.

"A programme like this caters to students who want to explore an interesting area, or who know what they want to do, but afte r studying continuously for 14 years, want to take a break, and those applying to universities abroad and want to build a profile," says Mohit Choudhary, project manager at Rishihood University, who took gaps not once, but between semesters many times during college to explore his goals.

"The programme gives a platform for such students to explore academic subjects, per sonality development, travel and cultural exploration, volunteering experiences, and project and internship opportunities. "

He adds that interest in the gap year concept is growing. "In 2020, we had a three-month online programme for which 15 students signed up. This time, it is residential and 25 students have enrolled. "

Exploring beyond academics is the ultimate idea of a gap year, says Sagarikka S, a 22-year-old entrepreneur and author of the book, 'My Unskooled Year', which she wrote in 2016 after Class X, when she decided to take a gap year.

" The only rule my parents set for me was to be disciplined. I formed a routine on the first day, to work out, stay updated on current affairs, and understand the stock market. I also researched my academic interests on YouTube, looked up online university courses, attended conferences every month, and did a bunch of internships.

Though a routine sounds bo ring and may be hard to follow, it paves the way for a productive gap year," says Sagarikka, adding that the year-long routine was instrumental in keeping her life organised in the past six years when she has been working, studying for her BBA and running her entrepreneurial venture HiNite.

"A gap year could be a good time for students to get a perspective on the field oftheir choice, before taking it up," says career consultant Jayaprakash Gandhi.

A world of online opportunities opened up during the pandemic. From travel itineraries to educati onal resources, modern tech doesn't lack guidance. Coding, competitive exam preparation, travel, and business ideas and possibilities can be explored with it during a gap year.

Tak ing a break to find what one wants to do is also being encouraged by many Indian universities.
The Indian Institute of Technology introduced deferred placements to allow students to pursue entrepreneurial ideas before taking up employment.

Liberal arts universities like Krea, Flame and O P Jindal Global highly consider gap-ye ar students who can produce proof of their work; a book, a documentary, a short film, internship, online courses, boot camps, volunteer experiences, or travel vlogs. Many of these universi ties note higher academic success rates in students who've taken a gap year.
GapX is a gap year community start-up by students of Ashoka University in 2022, with a strength of 40 gap year students fro m all over India. GapX has collaborated with programmes like Anvesha to provide a platform for students and cultivate gap year culture.

"There are organisations such as CanGap, GapYear Nepal, and GapYearSpain to promote gap years in various countries. But in India, a gap year is still astigma. Despite that, when students take a gap year they get overwhelmed with the enormous number of op tions," says Anshika Bhatnagar, Cofounder of GapX.

"In our community, we organise weekly meets and help the student schedule his interests at his pace unlike an academic curriculum, and pair him up with a peer buddy with whom he can share and discuss their progress. " GapX has done several collaborative volunteering projects which include the project Naqsh where they transform ed a village named Asawarpur in Sonipat with their artwork.

Gap year students are also provided guidance by many NGOs in exploring their fields of interest. Dakshin Endeavours, an environmental conservation NGO, is one of them and conducted a three-month programme named Mind the Gap Year online during the pandemic in 2020. "I did a programme in marine conservation as I wanted a career in marine bi ology.

Attending the programme gave me an idea of the subject as well as helped me in my admissions," says Adhithi Balaji, a 20-year-old based in Chennai. "Gap years in a student's profile are condoned as long as the student pursues certain skill sets that will add value to their career later.

It can also better the chances of admission respective to the eligibility criteria," says S V aidhyasubramaniam, vice-chancellor of SASTRA University. Placements aren't affected for a student who took gaps after high school as long as they provide certifications for the skill sets ac quired in the gap year. "If I were a recruiter, I would appreciate the gap year student to have taken that risk to get themselves additionally qualified and then come for a college education," he says.