Pooja Patel visits the Discover Dome, a unique mobile planetarium that has been designed to help children understand the world of astronauts, and learns more about why children want to be astronauts!

When it comes to choosing a career, the children of modern India prefer to choose options beyond the standard. Medicine, engineering and law are now passe and space and astronomy are among the new buzz words! This fact came to light recently when Nickelodeon, a children’s channel, conducted a survey asking children about their preferred career options. In most cases, children were thrilled at the thought of going into space and working at zero gravity.

Disha Joseph, a class 4 student at Delhi Public School, Bengaluru says, “I would love to become an astronaut and I am very passionate about this dream. I love to study the stars, the Moon, the planets, galaxies and other related topics. I am not completely aware of the subjects I need to be good at in school to pursue this career, but I know mathematics is a necessity and I love the subject. If I cannot become an astronaut, then I would love to be a space scientist. I would like to study the stars and do research on their origin and other celestial stuff.”

Similarly, Manishkaa Patil, a class 3 student from Hiranandani Foundation School, Thane says, “My first experience with learning about the sky was when I asked my mom why the moon has spots and why
Towerless Phones

Of late, a lot has been written about how cell phone towers are damaging human health. But fortunately, scientists have already developed a new mobile technology which will work without cell phone towers and also improve call transmission. This software has been created by an international team of researchers led by Flinders University, Australia.

Dreaming of Space

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it waxes and wanes. In school we study about sun spots and sun flares and I think most children would be interested in learning and discovering more about the world that lies beyond what we can see.Indeed, there is a whole new world to explore in outer space and with the development of innovative technologies that can help decode the mysteries of the Universe, this field has only become more interesting. One example of this is the recent discoveries about new planets by the Kepler mission, which have challenged scientists’ imagination and knowledge, Professor Patricia Reiff, Director of the Rice Space Institute says, “I feel lucky to be working as a space scientist because this is one space that leaves you surprised every time you approach it. Each time you do research on something related to space, you come across a new unexplored element. This quality in space study ensures that one never gets tired of looking up to in this field and if your interests lie in research on something related to space, you come across a new unexplored element. This quality in space study ensures that one never gets tired of

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~ Asha Sundararajan, educationist, space expert and founder-director of Children’s Technology

... and founder-director of Children’s Technology Workshop says, “Children today have the capability of pursuing their dreams, be they anything. I have conducted many astronomy workshops at different places and the way the children reciprocate, it’s totally unbelievable. Today’s children, no matter what kind of school they come from, have a lot of potential and have a very curious mind. I have come across children who ask really practical questions and at times it’s hard to believe that they could think that way considering their age. I encourage my students to write to scientists across the globe and when they get a reply from these scientists they are thrilled and encouraged furthermore.”

Asha adds, “If your aim is to be an astronaut, the very basic necessity is a love for physics and mathematics. Along with that, an astronaut has to be physically strong as it takes a lot of strength and strategy to be in space.”

To help children understand the science of space better, Nickelodeon recently brought Discovery Domes to four major cities. This kick started its annual career series with the Young Astronaut Programmes 2011. These Discovery Domes, which were set up in Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai, are unique mobile planetariums. These domes travelled across India as part of the NASA Magnetospheric Multi-scale Mission, which educates children about space science. The domes gave an awesome 3D experience, which taught children about asteroids, black holes and the mysteries of the Universe. After a visit to the dome, children participating in this programme were asked to write an essay about why they want to become astronauts. The winners of the contest will be announced in the month of March and will get a chance to visit NASA.

India has made major contributions to the field of astronomy and close to 36% of the employees of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) are Indians. Last year, the centenary birth anniversary of astrophysicist and Nobel laureate Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar was celebrated globally. NASA has even named its space observatory after this famous astrophysicist. Indian children therefore have plenty of role models to look up to in this field and if your interests lie in the study of space, being an astronaut is not your only choice. As Nina Elavia Jaipuria, Senior Vice President and General Manager, Nickelodeon says, “Space has opened up a lot of options over the years and so it is now not restricted to only being an astronaut. You can also become a space scientist, a space engineer, a space communicator, a space educator, a chip designer or a rocket scientist.”

Asha Sundararajan, educationist, space expert and founder-director of Children’s Technology.