



Paper plane pilots Dylan Parker (left) and James Norton with students of The Newtown School during a workshop at ArtsAcre Foundation on Tuesday. Picture by Pabitra Das

Aussie duo take kids on flight of fancy

CHANDREYEE GHOSE

Feb. 23: “Fasten your seatbelts and get ready for take-off,” the pilots told the students.

The young audience cheered loudly, ready to embark on an exciting creative journey. These students of classes III to V of The Newtown School were not on board a plane but in an auditorium at the ArtsAcre Foundation in New Town, learning how to make paper planes. Teaching them the tricks were two Australian paper pilots-turned-educators, Dylan Parker and James Norton, who have turned their childhood passion into an effective education tool.

The children were taught how to make planes of different shapes and sizes that looked like dolphins, flowers and birds. Some could fly real high while others stayed aloft for a longer time.

Marketing expert Parker and landscape architect Norton came dressed in the Australian air force uniform. “We don’t fly real planes, but make paper ones. We hope to inspire students to love science and fly real ones in future,” said the duo.

The duo had met at the Uni-

versity of Canberra nine years ago and connected over paper planes. “We both loved the common pastime of our childhood. We used to make plenty of paper planes and fly them over the countryside,” said Norton, 31.

Their love took them to the World Paper Plane Championships where Parker clinched the third spot in the distance category. “We decided to bring back such simple joys in students’ lives and help them learn basic concepts of science and math better,” Norton said.

From holding workshops and creating different kinds of paper planes to drawing up a curriculum for schools, the duo began reaching out to more students with their new education tool.

Initially, Parker and Norton juggled their passion with their jobs till they quit two years ago to follow their vision fulltime. “When my mother came to know I had quit to make paper planes she was not too happy. But she believed in me,” said Parker, 29. Since then the two have been travelling all over the world to teach through such fun activities.

“In Japan, children are taught origami. That teaches them patience, persistence and

resilience early in life. We plan to boost a child’s confidence, problem-solving skills and learning ability through paper plane making,” Norton said.

In India for the first time, the duo did a five-city tour organised by the Australian High Commission. Calcutta was their last stop after Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi and Jaipur.

“Every child is fascinated by flying. We teach them basic physics, math, history of flying and concepts such as lift, thrust, drag and gravity through creativity,” said Parker. “The kids in India were full of enthusiasm and so much more competitive,” said Norton.

The schools that took part in the workshops held on February 20 and 21 included The Akshar School, DPS Ruby Park and Calcutta International School.

Theory lessons over, it was time to hit the outdoors and fly planes. “That’s the fun part,” said Norton as the duo watched the happy faces of the kids.

“I have made paper planes many times, but this one is special,” said an excited Bhavya Agarwal of Class V. “I learnt how to make my plane stay up a little longer,” beamed classmate Yash Soni.