

# VOICES OF TEACHING

## Stories from the classroom

November 2024



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# Foreword

On the occasion of teachers day, The Simple Education Foundation collaborated with the EkStep Foundation-Bachpan Manao team to create a space for teachers to take centre-stage and share their experiences from the classrooms via the ***‘voices of teaching’*** conference. The endeavour was to hear from teachers, the practices that they see working and their everyday moments of joy and the connections that make the teaching experience worthwhile. SEF believes that teachers are really the change makers of the country, and the event was organised to understand from teachers, what it takes to create this change.

While a lot is changing in the domain of education with multiple stakeholders from civil-society, government and private institutions and organisations contributing to the sector, we have not done enough to tap into the *voices of teachers* and hear their unabridged stories. Teachers are centres of care for the children, who have dedicated their life to this profession.

This report aims to elevate the voices of teachers, illuminating their invaluable insights and experiences that are often overlooked. **By sharing their stories, we not only honour their dedication but also pave the way for meaningful dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders in education.** It is through these narratives that we can better understand the realities of the classroom and inspire transformative change, ensuring that every child's potential is nurtured. Hope, through this effort we can listen, learn, and act together to empower our teachers and, in turn, empower the future.

# Lessons learnt : insights from the ‘*voices of teaching*’ conference

**1** **Whether in life, theatre, or education, the backstory is always compelling.** While some changes in the teaching profession are evident to observers, the intricate dynamics and daily realities of educators frequently go unrecognised. Through this initiative, we aim to shine a light on these untold stories, providing insight into the multifaceted world of teaching that deserves to be heard.

**3** **The role teachers today has become an exercise of filling the \*blank\* that they attempt every day as per the need of the hour.** They are a multifaceted support system for students. They become counsellors, advocates, mentors, friends – based on the situation. This evolution mirrors the rapid changes in our society, which are much more pronounced than they were a decade ago. The emotional investment teachers make often goes unnoticed, yet it is vital for providing support that extends beyond academics,

**2** As parents and adults, we are often conditioned by the traditional education system, which positioned schools and teachers as mere disseminators of information. **This outdated mindset can hinder our ability to recognise that today’s schools are designed to foster holistic development.** Modern educational environments emphasise not only academic knowledge but also essential values such as empathy and collaboration. Embracing this shift is crucial for supporting our children’s growth in a rapidly



## Lessons learnt : insights from the ‘*voices of teaching*’ conference

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As teachers continuously adapt to the changing educational landscape, they require robust support and understanding from the entire ecosystem.

**With the evolution of teaching, training and support must also advance.** Educators need to embrace modern classroom management techniques and emotional support strategies, moving away from outdated disciplinary practices. Prioritising teachers’ emotional well-being is crucial for their effectiveness; thus, we must implement initiatives that focus on their mental health, empowering them to nurture their students more effectively.



5

Creating safe environments where students feel comfortable expressing themselves is essential, particularly for those from challenging backgrounds who may face additional emotional and social hurdles. **It takes a big heart to teach little minds.** Recognising this critical aspect of teaching requires support from civil society, which plays a pivotal role in promoting and sustaining such environments. By investing in these initiatives, we not only validate the important work that teachers do but also help empower them to support their students effectively

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Teachers often find creative ways to bring concepts to life in the classroom, using the most unexpected materials. They have an innate ability to turn everyday objects into powerful learning tools, helping students connect what they're studying with the world around them. Teachers mentioned they have used - an orange to teach their students about the Earth’s layers, or plastic bottles to explain volcanic eruption, clothes to demonstrate patterns, filled water bottles to bring alive fractions.

## The Hidden World of Teaching: What No One Tells You About a Teacher's Daily Life

When we think of teachers, we often think of pedagogy and learning. Some anecdotes shared by teachers during the voices of teaching conference show us how the health and life of children have been saved thanks to the intervention from their teachers.

“I had 11 children in my class who have some special needs. After COVID - one of these students did not come to class at all. When I started to call his parents, they repeatedly told me that he has a stomach issue and needs to use the washroom frequently and therefore he is not able to sit through in school. This went on for a few months. I had not even seen the child. I was only having these conversations with his parents on the phone. I felt something was amiss. I went by my instinct and insisted that the parents bring the child to school and we meet face-to-face. I had to be very stern and also take the help of the school leadership and the special educator in our school. Finally, the child came to school. The child looked completely pale. We told the parents that the child would have to be sent to school and we would take care of the child completely. We were stern with the parents and hence they had to agree. After he started to come to school, we realised, that the real problem was not a stomach issue, but he had social anxiety. He could copy things from the board, but he could not express himself or make friends. He would try away from speaking to anyone. During the Covid years, his parents had actually kept him indoors and asked him not to interact with anyone at all. Due to which he also started to develop health problems, our school and teachers took him to the hospital and got him assisted by a physician and a psychologist and started on his treatment. As of today, he still has physical problems, but he is able to slowly come out of his shell. He greets the teacher, has started to make a few friends. I feel all of this happened because we at school insisted that we meet his parents. Else, his parents would have kept him in a shell for the longest time, and his condition would have deteriorated.”

### ‘Breaking the Silence’: How One Teacher's Instincts Helped a Child Overcome Social Anxiety





## The Hidden World of Teaching: What No One Tells You About a Teacher's Daily Life

When we think of teachers, we often think of pedagogy and learning. Some anecdotes shared by teachers during the voices of teaching conference show us how the health and life of children have been saved thanks to the intervention from their teachers.

**‘Standing on one’s own feet’  
- a story that truly shows  
how a teacher can literally  
help shape the future of a  
child.**



“I teach in rural Chhattisgarh where we have to go into the villages and actually get the children to come and attend school. When I went into the village, I found a girl whose leg was completely burnt and during the accident, her calf got stuck to her thigh at the back because of which she could not walk. In the villages and tribal areas, even the women drink. Her mother had consumed alcohol and was lying unconscious near the fire while cooking, and had not realised that her child’s leg had got burnt. We got the child to school and had to keep her in the infirmary. Her mother at first started to fight with us later on. We also got the mother to stay with her in the infirmary. We also had language issues since her mother could barely speak Hindi, we somehow took the help of the authorities and manage to convince her that the child needed medical attention. We took her to hospital in Raipur, where her leg was operated. Post operation, it took her long while for her wound to heal. The girl was very cooperative and had an eagerness to learn. It took her 2 to 3 years for her to completely heal from the accident and get back on her feet. During those years we also had to make sure that she is not completely disconnected from learning. And hence, we also kept teaching her slowly alongside. Later, she started to walk, but her leg was not fully able to touch the ground, and hence we had to get her a prosthetic leg to enable her to walk. Today she is in the 12th grade and doing very well in her life. She is an example to the whole village and community about the positive influence that a school can have on someone's life. I feel fortunate that I was able to help somebody due to the profession I am in. If I was not a teacher, I would not have been able to intervene.”







*Shikshak kabhi sadharan nahin hota, Pralay aur nirmaan shikshak ke god mein hi palte hain*  
*A teacher is never ordinary, destruction and creation flourish in the lap of a teacher.*

To recognise the transformative impact teachers have on the future of children and society,  
this report amplifies their voices, revealing their powerful stories firsthand.

## Anita Ma'am - Directorate of Education, TGT Math Teacher



### Story 1 : ‘The story of a nation builder’ : Anita Ma'am who believes in the spirit of transformation in teaching

#### **Motivation: the power of the profession**

“We are nation builders. The school is like a mini society. Whether the future world is going to be beautiful or not, to a great extent, teachers are responsible for that. **Even as adults, we can think back about teachers who inspired us to become who we are today. There is so much power and strength in the profession of teaching.**”

**Teachers are not just educators; they are the architects of a better future**

#### **Philosophy - School is not about subjects taught, but about the kind of humans we create.**

“If we are teaching children about dirty surroundings, are we a zero waste school? If we are talking about empathy to children, are we dealing with them empathetically? We are like second parents for the children. They come from families where their parents are busy earning a living and hence they are not able to influence their mindset. Sometimes children confide in us about problems at home. They could be financial problems that they talk about. At such times the principal, the teachers and all the stakeholders go out of their way to make such children feel at home in the school. They have been times where the principal has, bought school uniform for the child so that the child does not feel out of place in school. The outside world knows very little about these experiences of teachers.

## Anita Ma'am - Directorate of Education, TGT Math Teacher



*“Teachers have to keep themselves patient in the classroom, but there is a lot of inner work or Riyaaz that is required to be able to stay conscious and present in the classroom.”*

### Aha moment : children are the best teachers

“During Covid, we were all feeling low and I logged into my online class. I asked the children how they were doing. The children were from low financial backgrounds. One of the children’s father had lost his job. I tried to counsel him, but he intern told me, everything is okay and not to worry about him. That made me realise, with all my privileges I was still feeling low. But the child struggling through difficult circumstances was still in high spirits. There's always something new to learn from children every day. That energy from children keeps us going.”

**In the classroom,  
every day is a  
lesson in  
resilience and  
empathy—both for  
students and  
teachers.**

### Constructive discipline keeps me going:

“Traditional schooling with a certain kind of discipline is not necessarily enabling children to grow. It does not teach them empathy and collaboration. **Teachers are expected to do this for 8 hours a day. That is a lot of consciousness to show up with.** A teacher needs to equip herself with how to discipline students constructively. Old ways only suggest - snub the child and mistakes are not welcome. We have 70-80 students in a class and hence we lose patience. But when we lose patience, we are teaching them to lose patience. **When I go to a class with little ones and there is a lot of noise, I just say machli jal ki...and they all say rani hai.** These are small attention grabbers that can discipline children without shouting at them. We need training for that. We have been trained to use some strategies like team pair solo, think pair share, mingle mingle that allow us to infuse play and fun even in a math class.

## Lavina Ma'am - Umeed Inclusion Fellow and teacher



**Story 2 : ‘The story of an inclusion advocate’:  
rooted in empathy,  
advocating for inclusion &  
creating change.**

### **Motivation: champion the cause of inclusion**

“When my child was 2 years old and I used to go for PTMs, I could see parents had questions that they were not able to voice out. That is when I realised that there is a need to talk more about inclusion. Schools today have access to material resources via organisations or the government. Books and uniforms etc. are being made available to all children. But that does not do anything for emotional well being of the child. We need to emphasise inclusion in the mind of the parents and the school management.”

*"The important thing is to create an environment where children feel safe and valued. If they see the light in your eyes, they will ask 2% of you but give you 250 %. We need to ensure we do not take away from light from them."*

### **Philosophy - Each and every child has the potential to learn regardless of their challenges.**

“ We had a child who was on the spectrum who had behavioural and sensory issues. Universal Design Learning and SEL equips the teacher with strategies such that she does not always have to make the extra effort but the child still can function and thrive in the environment. It sensitises other children so that they become empathetic and take care of the child in such a way that the child does not feel ‘different’. It pushed me to advocate for more inclusive practices in everyday life. If the child is not feeling emotionally plugged in to the class, the learning will suffer. As a teacher, I remember a child coming to class and putting his head down. Normally, one would have assumed that the child is not feeling well and would have encouraged the child to put his head down and rest. But if we spend a few minutes with a child to understand what happened before he came to class, and realised his parents were not being able to prepare a fresh snack for his lunch and just bought *vada-pav* on his way to school to put in his lunchbox, which he did not want to eat. When that emotional baggage was taken care of, first, the child could plug into the class and proceed with his learning.”



## Lavina Ma'am - Umeed Inclusion Fellow and teacher



### **Aha moment : A teacher has to constantly act, pause and retrace her steps**

“Sometimes, we teachers feel anxiety looking at the faces of children since we know, whatever we are trying to explain to them is not connecting with them. The most difficult moment was when a child was asked to leave the school. He was on the spectrum. **I was running from pillar to Post, talking to the Management talking to his parents to make sure that the child does not have to leave school, but nothing worked. At that point of time, I could've thought that the child will find another school, and the hundreds of children learning in my school will continue to benefit. But I thought of the impact this would have on the 30 children who were in his class. They would feel that if a child is not able to perform in the race, he is thrown out of the race.** That is when I decided to retrace my steps back and talk to the committee again. I told them if there is a problem, by shutting our eyes to it, the problem does not go away. We need to work towards finding a solution to this problem”

*“Empathy is something children naturally have in them - they are born with it. They show us empathy through small gestures and that keeps me motivated.”*

### **Appreciation box - small yet powerful initiative to change classroom culture.**

“We used to have a complain box in our school, and anybody could drop a complain in the box which would be opened every Friday. We shifted the thought from complaints to appreciation. **We replaced the complaint box with an appreciation box** in which children would drop in notes for their appearance or their teachers or teachers could drop appreciation for the children. **Teachers and children normally exchange cards on special occasion once a year like teachers day children's day. But this way they were able to find out every week, what is good or appreciation worthy,**

**Teachers should keep changing their strategies - one thing may not work, but something else will.**

## Ayesha Ma'am - Pre-primary teacher - BET English Nursery and Higher Primary School



### **Motivation: rooted in childhood experiences**

“I went to a government school. I did not get to experience all those things as a child. What I did not experience as a child, I want to be a part of offering that experience to my children as a teacher. I remember my 8th standard teacher. She was supportive all the time. Whenever I would share any of my learning struggles with her, she would always help me out. Since that day, I wanted to become a teacher and a teacher like her.”

*“My children love me a lot. Whenever there is teachers day and they wear saree and come to class, they say Ayesha ma'am, I have become you. I would like to tell them to go and become better than what I am”*

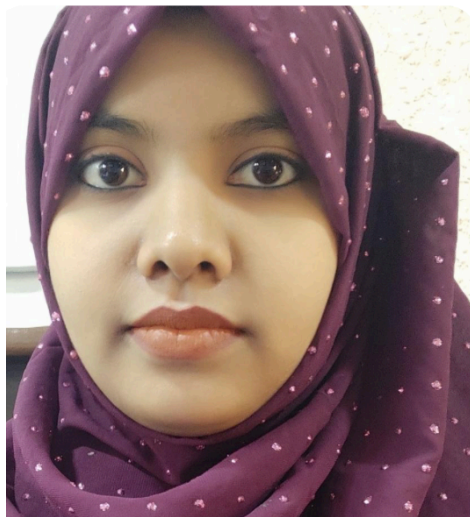
### **Story 3 : ‘The child within’ Ayesha Ma'am's Journey of Play, Love, and Growth**

#### **Philosophy - play is at the heart of learning**

“If you were to walk into my class, you would find interesting activities from the beginning. I have picture options for my students on how they would like me to greet them. They have to choose the picture and based on that I would greet them. The options it has our namaste or a hi-fi et cetera. Once they enter the class we have another activity for attendance since the class is noisy. I have created an attention grabber to, help them quieten down. Once the attendance is over, we have to take attendance number count. For that there is another activity. I have written the words twinkling star and hiding stars on my board. I have also written the names of children on ice cream sticks. I pick up a stick, and that child has to come and count the number of students in class and write it against the twinkling stars. The ones who are absent are the hiding stars. I also have another activity where there are paper cups with Home and School written on it, and we have ice cream sticks with the pictures of all children. Sometimes we get the children to put the relevant ice cream sticks in the home versus School paper cup.”



## Ayesha Ma'am - Pre-primary teacher - BET English Nursery and Higher Primary School



### **Aha moment : what happens before and after school impacts what happens during school.**

“Some children are willing to share things with us. Some children find it difficult to understand and express their feelings. In such cases I usually elicit a response by telling them a story of another child who was angry that morning at school, but was not able to tell her father why she was angry and her father gave her a set of crayons and asked her to draw why she was angry. Or I might tell them during circle time, why I feel angry at certain things or why I feel sad. That encourages the students to start sharing. When they share things about their parents, I also advise and counsel the parents not to be strict with them or hit them since waking up in the morning and coming to school itself is a big thing for a small child.”

*“We have to focus on their emotions and safety. The learning of content can happen anytime, even when they are older.”*

### **What keeps her motivated is the love from children and the ease of working in a non-judgemental atmosphere created by them**

“Though I underwent teacher training and was the perfect student there doing all the things that my teacher asked me to do, on the first day of school I don't know why I got scared. The students were so small but I did not know what to do in the class. On the first day, I cried and came back home. I spoke to my mother who is also my first teacher and narrated the whole story of what happened at school - non stop. At the end of that I told her, tomorrow I am not going to school. My sister also overheard my story and she told me to visit her class the following day. She has been teaching for a long time, and she said that her children and the parents of those children have now all become comfortable with her. My mother reminded me about my childhood and how I used to role-play being the teacher all the time. she told me I would make the pillow stand and pretend those were my students. She said think about the little children in your class, and think of them as pillows. There are nothing but talking pillows. That really encouraged me. I also spoke to my father's brother who I am very close to. We live in a joint family, and I am usually the one who is handling all the little ones in my family. I play all of the games with them. My uncle reminded me of my role in the family and said I could handle the children even at school. The next day I started to go to school with a little more confidence in myself. They made me confident. Whatever I would tell them, they would listen to me. I couldn't expect the management or my colleagues to listen to me. But my children always listen to me..”

## Lalitha Ma'am - Teacher - Government Higher Primary School, Koppa Gate



### **Motivation: inspired by the idea of 'lifelong learning'**

“My inspiration has been my uncle who has always told me to continue learning learning. He was a teacher and he use that opportunity because he believed that teachers shape society. And those words stayed with me. That is the reason why despite many obstacles from family, I chose to overcome those and continue my journey as a teacher.”

*“Innovation has become a norm now a days since the attention span of a student is very low. The lecture method wont work. Children will start to lose attention.”*

### **Philosophy - connect with the child, if the child has to connect with learning**

“There was a child in my classroom who was hyperactive and his parents were struggling with getting him to focus on activities. They tried several things, but nothing worked. I have been able to work with him for the last three months and finalise his energies. I believe in creating a rapport with every child, but also creating stability and structure in the classrooms by following routines, which help them settle into their activities.”

## Story 4 : Lalitha Ma'am's 'Everyday Attempt at Nurturing Creativity'

## Lalitha Ma'am - Teacher - Government Higher Primary School, Koppa Gate



### **Aha moment : create in children the joy of creating**

“To engage students, I realise I need to leave with my own creativity and create my own TLMs. I don't use printouts and worksheets since children already have seen a lot of that and they would not really find that interesting. When we create something new children develop an interest and curiosity to find out more about it. Whether it's birds, insects, or animals - all of these have been created using craft. We also have a lot of face masks in our class for all the animals and birds. And children are free during their lunchtime. They wear these masks. We can use them to encourage children and ask them if you are a butterfly, what sound does it make, et cetera, to teach children things.”

**Teachers and students are partners in learning—both needing an environment that nurtures their growth.**

**While there is so much focus in the eco system on training and capacity building of teachers, there is so much capacity already present amongst teachers. What is needed is a conducive environment to bring out that creativity.**

## Meenakshi Ma'am - Teacher - Tehri, Garhwal - Uttarakhand



### **Motivation: synergies between children at home and at school.**

“I started my journey not by choice but my parents made this choice of profession for me. In those days we did not have too many options. I completed by MSc and BEd. and started to teach after I got married. I had two children who were about the same age as the children who I was teaching. Whatever I experienced at home with the children, was similar to the experience, I had with my children at school and vice versa, and that got me really interested in the profession. While my daughter was doing well at studies, my son was finding writing a big challenge. For his entire year in the Play group, he was not able to write a single letter of the alphabet. I also encountered the same challenge with some of the children in my classroom, and I started to work with them. Though they were three children in my class who could not write and one child at home - I realise the problem is the same, but the reasons why the children are not able to write a different different and every child needed a unique approach. I worked with my own son during the winter and the summer breaks and was able to get him to write the entire alphabet from a to Z, but I also realised that he was not progressing as swiftly in class. That made me, understand that not all children in a class would be able to progress at the same pace. Since then, I've always found it more interesting to work with the children who are slow since working with them not only helps them. It also

### **Story 5 : ‘Beyond the Classroom’: the Gentle Yet Persistent Meenakshi Ma'am's Village of Learning**

#### **Philosophy - evolved from the children themselves**

“When I used to teach in the remote areas, I often found a place to stay in the community where I was teaching. This way I got a chance to watch what was happening in their homes at least on the holidays. I noticed that many times children are left with their grandparents since both the parents, spent all day at the farm. Grandparents were often not educated and therefore could not really support the children on physically looking after them or giving them food. Children would spend a lot of time with their peers. Though I believe the children learn a lot with their peers, that kind of learning is very different from what a child would learn from an adult. That learning from an adult was missing in a child's life. Hence, I need to plug that gap in my classrooms. Although I am a science teacher, many times a lot of the discussions in the classroom go beyond science, and my children like to share with me, whatever they are not able to share with their parents back home.”



## Meenakshi Ma'am - Teacher - Tehri, Garhwal - Uttarakhand



### **Aha moment : Life lessons that are more valuable than academic lessons**

“My classrooms would be very colourful. I believed whatever children are able to learn by looking at the charts on the walls of the classroom, they would not learn by looking at the textbook which opens only on specific occasions. Hence, we would make a lot of charts for all the subjects and display them around the classroom. One day, when I walked into the class, I was heartbroken to see that the charts that we had made as a class with a lot of effort were torn by some of the children. It was a moment of anger and heartbreak for me since I felt that the efforts of the other children were not respected by some of the children in the class. We found out who these children were. At first, I called their parents and informed them about their actions. The parents give us a free hand to deal with them which ever we wanted to. My instinctive reaction was to scold them and get angry at them, but then I pause for a moment and reflected, that the damage is done. The charts are torn. I will not get the charts back by scolding them or punishing them. Instead, the punishment was to recreate the charts and

*“It takes a village to raise a child., though we find that the child's village is shrinking and hence we need to offer that*

### **Keeps herself motivated by: finding unique solutions to textbook problems**

“in a maths class, I recreated the game of snakes and ladders, which had maths concepts associated with it. By playing the game again and again, not only were they able to do maths calculations, but a lot of concepts would get clarified in the process. I created another game to clarify the concept of place value with children. I had a chart with several pockets for the tens hundreds and units. Place. One child had to give another child number, and another child had to pick up cards and place them in the right place, Value. We had not labelled the pockets with the place value. It was upon the child to decipher it himself. When children would place the card in the wrong place -value pocket, I would often ask them - when you go home today from school, would you go to your house or would you just go to any other house that you find on the way. That helped them clarify the concept of place value for numbers. It also helped them clarify the concept of zero - when there is a zero in a four digit number, one doesn't skip the zero - it simply means that the house is locked or there is no one in the house. This way they were able to understand the concept of place value very clearly and were able to quickly progress to very large 6 - 7 digit numbers.”

## Sneha Ma'am - Grade 5 Teacher - Govt. school, Delhi



### Story 6 : 'Blue sky thinking': Sneha Ma'am's insightful observations and creative solutions for every child's journey

#### **Motivation: a desire to leave her unique stamp on the**

"When I was growing up, there was barely a choice we could make about our profession. My elder sister was already a teacher and I had to follow suit. But I was very clear that I would want to teach children my own way. As a child, there were certain things that I did not like as a student, and I did not want to replicate those with the children I teach. Hence, I decided that I would teach in my own unique way. There is a difference between *padhaana* and *sikhaana*. *Padhaana* is lecturing a child. *Sikhaana* involves ensuring that one tunes into the child and adapts to what he needs. Children are absolutely raw. Some children might learn fast while others might learn slow. Some children might learn a certain way, but not all. If you look at some children closely, they will be able to communicate to us in an unsaid way, "Ma'am, you're not able to explain things to me nicely." At such times, we have to change our way of teaching. I keep trying different ways till the child gets it. Sometimes it even involves teaching the child one on one. "

#### **Philosophy - freedom and play are instinctive to children**

"I started very enthusiastically but soon realised, what I learnt as part of teacher training and what I see on the ground is very different. Children cannot be bound to the desk for five hours at a stretch. I observe that when children start to make excuses about going to the washroom or other things, they are trying to escape the classroom environment. They also would seem very happy as soon as the class bell rang and they were out of the classrooms. That made me realise that if I have to teach anything to these children, I have to put myself in their shoes and understand how they feel. I also need to extend the same environment to them like they used to at home if I have to succeed in emotionally connecting with them. Hence I started to take children out in the open no matter what the topic of learning."

*"I do not think of challenges that come my way, since I feel that the work of the teacher is to actually overcome challenges and set an example to her students so that they also learn to do the same when they grew up."*

## Sneha Ma'am - Grade 5 Teacher - Govt. school, Delhi





***“Children, are like bamboo trees. A bamboo tree has to be watered for five years before it can show you any growth. But after five years within few months, it can double the size of the human being. similarly have to be given a very strong foundation till the fifth grade. Once they have taken root, they will be able to thrive.”***

### **Motivated by: Going the extra mile for children who are neglected by society. s**

“The children who come to government schools are marginalised by society. No other school wants to take them easily. But it is our duty as their teachers to teach the values such that they are able to integrate with the rest of the society positively. Even if I am able to teach one or two positive things to a child, I think of it as a personal victory. I am never in a hurry to leave the class when the bell rings. My children also stay back. I only keep thinking that if there is anything more that I'm able to give to them, then I should tell them that before I leave the class. I include a lot of stories during my lessons because five hours of lessons can get boring for a child but a child will never forget the stories that the teacher has told.”

### **Aha moment : A teacher hasn't taught well, till the student has internalised the concept.**

“There are couple of topics in geography that the children were getting very confused with. Continents and oceans was one of them. We tried several methods and teaching aids to explain the names and the positions. I observe that children would understand but not be able to recall the names and positions of oceans and continents. At last, I divided them into groups and each group leader was given the name of a continent. Similarly, there were certain children who represented oceans. I took them to the playground. It had been raining and hence there was grass and water and mud batches on the ground. I explain to them that the large mud batches are like continents. The water between the two month patches of continents are like oceans. And smaller patches with grass surrounded by water, are like islands. Then I need it group of children who represented the continents stand next to the mud patches. This we were able to learn the names and also understand the positions of these continents. Another time, I made them use their hands and explain to them that the fingers are like the longitudes and the horizontal lines on the fingers are like the latitudes. The central line where the fingers fold into the palm is like the equator. Anything above that line leads to colder temperatures. I made them cup their hands together and explain to them that the Fingers represent time zones across the globe. That way they were able to understand the concept of temperature zones and time zones quite easily.”

## Anila Ma'am - Primary Teacher - Govt. school, Delhi



### Story 7 : 'The Zen Teacher': Anila Ma'am's Journey of Patience, Play, and Purpose"

#### **Motivation: I did not choose the profession - the profession chose me.**

"My mother was a teacher. I grew up in a joint family. We were a total of 12 to 13 kids. I was the oldest amongst all of them. My grandparents made sure that we were all very disciplined. Since I was the oldest, often I took care of the younger siblings and cousins. My favourite game was playing teacher-teacher. That is how I started to develop an interest. I have been teaching for the past 19 years in govt. schools in Delhi. I have started to teach pre-primary kids since 2019 and that has been the most rewarding phase and also one in which I have learnt the most."

#### **Philosophy - teaching is all about learning**

"There is a girl in my class who used to come Cry every day to school. She came with her mother. I would have to wait for her to settle down, but despite my best efforts, she would not settle down, and I would have to send her back with her mother. I tried to entice her by giving her candies, but even that didn't work. Then one day, I told her mother, if you would like your daughter to study and attend school, then leave her with me and just go home. Do not turn around and look back at her. The mother agreed to my advice. That little girl was just six years old , cried for the next 10-15 minutes. -I held her close to me and sat with her. At the end of those 1015 minutes, we were exhausted. I told her your mama left you here, my mama also forced me to come here and teach. Seems like both are mamas are quite tough on us. You must be tired. Let's drink water. We drank water, and then we both went to the washroom and washed our faces. I could see she started to feel a little more comfortable with me. For the next few days, I only got her to come to school and do some colouring. My main objective was to make her feel safe at school and feel like she can trust someone at school. Later on she started to also get involved in academic work. The kids who cry overwhelmed the adults. But I have noticed that one must always not get scared or nervous around them and just sit with them for sometime. Once they stop crying, they are yours forever."

## Anila Ma'am - Primary Teacher - Govt. school, Delhi



### **Aha moment : Sometimes I feel like a zen master when they learn without realising their are learning**

“I love observing children. If you come to my classroom, you will not find a quiet classroom. There will be a lot of buzz. I let them do whatever they want to do as long as they're not doing anything destructive. In our days, the lecturing method worked. These days children are always engage in some activity or the other and it is the skill of the teacher to be able to weave learning into those activities. Children often love to make a train of chairs in the classroom. I use that opportunity to play different games with them that teach them things, - like I could ask them about colours on the chair or play a game of focus with them, asking them to sit and stand along side the chairs. Sometimes I feel like a master in a Chinese movie who is training his pupils, though the pupils do not realise that.

*Teaching is not what I do, it is now my life.*

*“What teachers need - all teachers need is someone to talk to. Teachers are very adept at their work. All they need is someone to share their every day situations with. Sometimes I've had the opportunity to work with a co-teacher when we merged to Classes. I have enjoyed those situations when we work as a team, and we also get a chance to share with each other, what we are going through. Most of the times solutions are found by the individual themselves - all you need is someone who can use as a sounding board.”*

### **Motivated by: What inspires me - children and their innocence.**

“There was another instance when I had drawn on the board and had gone to invite my principal to show her how well the board was decorated. To my surprise when I came back, my children had re-decorated it. At first I was upset. On asking them, they said, “you looked like you were having so much drawing on the board. That made us also realise that even if we were to draw on the board, we would have a lot of fun. Hearing that answer, my anger melted away since they were right.”

## Pramod Sir - HM and Teacher - Govt. school, Kundia



### Story 8 : Pramod Sir: The Teacher Who Breaks Boundaries

#### **Motivation: Driven by passion, he left engineering to teach and found true fulfilment.**

“I studied electronic engineering. I always loved teaching. While other classmates went on to work. I also started to work but I was missing something and hence I did my BEd. While I was a student of engineering, I used to run a small school. With my experience of running the school, I felt that something was missing. That is why I decided to do my BEd and MA. That school has been on for more than 20 years. Of all my batchmates who are now at high positions as engineers, I feel I am living the most content life.”

#### **Philosophy - Nothing should come in the way of learning**

“When I worked in the private sector I thought differently. My thoughts changed when I started to see the children from govt. schools. The places they come from are very far and those remote places are such that children do not have anyone to encourage them to learn. to travel to school, they have to work for 2 to 3 km. The journey is not safe. They do not have any way of even riding a bicycle - since the road is so bad. They have to cross streams and rivulets. There is sometimes a danger of boulders, falling or wild animals attacking them. Their parents are busy at work and hence it is not possible for them to pick these children up from school. Sometimes the parents drop them off in the mornings. But most afternoons after school is done, I drop the children close to their home. I need to go in different directions to drop different sets of children. But I do not find this a burden. I do this willingly. We are only two teachers in the school. The other teacher also drops some children. Earlier we used to have only 40% children coming to school. Since we have started dropping the children, we now have 100% attendance every day.”



## Pramod Sir - HM and Teacher - Govt. school, Kundia



*“To promote hygiene and neatness, I started a "Star of the Day" activity, celebrating well-dressed children. This encouraged both kids and parents, fostering pride in personal care and cleanliness.”*

### **Aha moment : leading by example - erasing caste boundaries**

“The place where I believe a lot in the caste discrimination. However, I wanted to create an atmosphere where every child can sit with all their classmates and eat together and play together and learn together. These beliefs are so strongly embedded in the people of the village that it is difficult to change anything by merely telling them. Hence, I decided that the Change can start from me. I started to ask the children who belong to the SCST community to do small task for me - fetch me a glass of water, pour water for me, et cetera. the people of the village know that by my caste, I am a Brahman. slowly, other children also started mingling with these children and I could see discriminatory practises between the children reducing. That was a very memorable moment for me since I felt, I was able to change something in society.”

### **Motivated by the idea that: resources are limited but creativity is unlimited**

“These days there are a 100 different ways of teaching any concept to a child. My role is reducing. These days children do a lot on their own. One day I noticed a child in my class was distracted. I walked up to the child and asked him what he was doing. I noticed he had a piece of chalk in his hand. On seeing me, come towards him, he hit the chalk. I asked him to draw something with a chalk. He drew a circle on the floor with the chalk. Since we were approaching break time, all the other kids also started to come close and watch what was happening. After he drew a circle, I asked him to think about what more he could do with the circle. He said the circle could become a clock. I asked him to turn the circle into a clock. By this time, all the other kids started to add to the activity activity. Somebody told him to divide the clock into different parts to show the hours. Once that was over, I asked them how they could depict the time. Some kids ran and got a couple of sticks from the playground and use those to depict the our hand and minute hand. as a result of that activity, not just a fourth grade students, but also the younger students were all able to read the time on the clock. This went on for a few days. We had left the clock at the drawing as is on the floor. for the next few days, we kept discussing the time and different possibilities, and at the end of those 2-3 days, the concept of time was clear to everybody in school.”





**Concluding thoughts**

**Empowering Teachers:  
Supporting Their Growth, Well-Being, and Financial Health**

## Freedom for Teachers to Adapt Plans

Teaching is a dynamic process, and no two days are ever the same.

Teachers often enter each day with a plan, but various factors—such as the weather, student mood, or administrative pressures—can disrupt this plan. While there is an expectation to complete the syllabus, it's essential that teachers are given the freedom to adapt, especially since every child learns at a different pace. Some may need 10 minutes to complete a task, while others may require 30 minutes. A flexible approach allows teachers to cater to individual needs, but the rigid system often adds unnecessary pressure, limiting a teacher's ability to focus on what matters most: the student's growth.



## Prioritising Mental Well-Being for Teachers

The well-being of teachers is often overlooked. Teachers are under constant pressure, balancing work, home duties, and emotional challenges. One simple yet effective practice is the "morning huddle"—a 20-minute session where teachers can connect, engage in an activity, or simply relax before the school day starts. Ending the day with a feelings check-in allows teachers to reflect on their emotional state, providing a supportive environment to release stress. On days when in-person check-ins aren't possible, a simple message via WhatsApp asking, "How are you feeling today?" can have a profound impact. Just being asked this question can remind teachers that they are valued, and help ease the mental load they carry



# The Need for Teacher Training in Financial Literacy and Technology

Teachers, especially women, often juggle their school duties with managing their households, leading to high levels of stress. One critical support they need is training in financial literacy and budgeting. Many teachers earn a salary but lack the knowledge on how to manage, save, or invest their money. This lack of financial awareness often results in teachers feeling financially stretched, especially during festivals or personal needs. Providing teachers with financial training would not only alleviate some of their financial stress but also empower them to make better financial decisions for themselves and their families.

AI tools can help teachers a lot, if teachers are trained on how to use it. It is a useful tool for both teachers and students if they just know how to use it constructively. Online training enables wider reach and also helps teacher get comfortable get technology.





## Lack of Parental Support for Learning

One significant challenge in government schools is the lack of parental involvement in children's education. Many students return home and simply leave their schoolbags untouched until the next day. In contrast, private school students often benefit from active parental involvement, which encourages them to stay motivated and excel. Teachers can advise parents to set up a quiet study space at home, but in many cases, the parents' time and resources are stretched too thin to support their child's learning consistently. This gap in support significantly impacts the child's ability to stay engaged with their studies.





## The organisations that curated the conference



**Simple Education Foundation (SEF)** is a non-profit organisation based in Delhi. Since 2013, SEF has been working with the Government schools and State governments to build educator strengthening programs for current and future teachers to increase the standard of teaching in government schools across India. SEF currently works with the state education departments in Delhi, Punjab and Uttarakhand and has impacted over 1.5 lac teachers and 40 Lac children in India's Government schools



**EkStep Foundation** launched the "**Bachpan Manao, Badhte Jao**" initiative which celebrates abundance, growth, and play in a child's first 3000 days. Bachpan Manao focuses on encouraging parents and teachers to recognise the abundance of learning opportunities in every child's first 3000 days through play. Play is the ultimate cheat code that makes it possible by triggering a million neural connections per second to be formed in their first 3000 days. Parents and teachers can participate in unlocking this abundance by creating time, space and environment. Seeded by Ekstep Foundation, Bachpan Manao is a growing community with over 100 "Collab-actors".



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