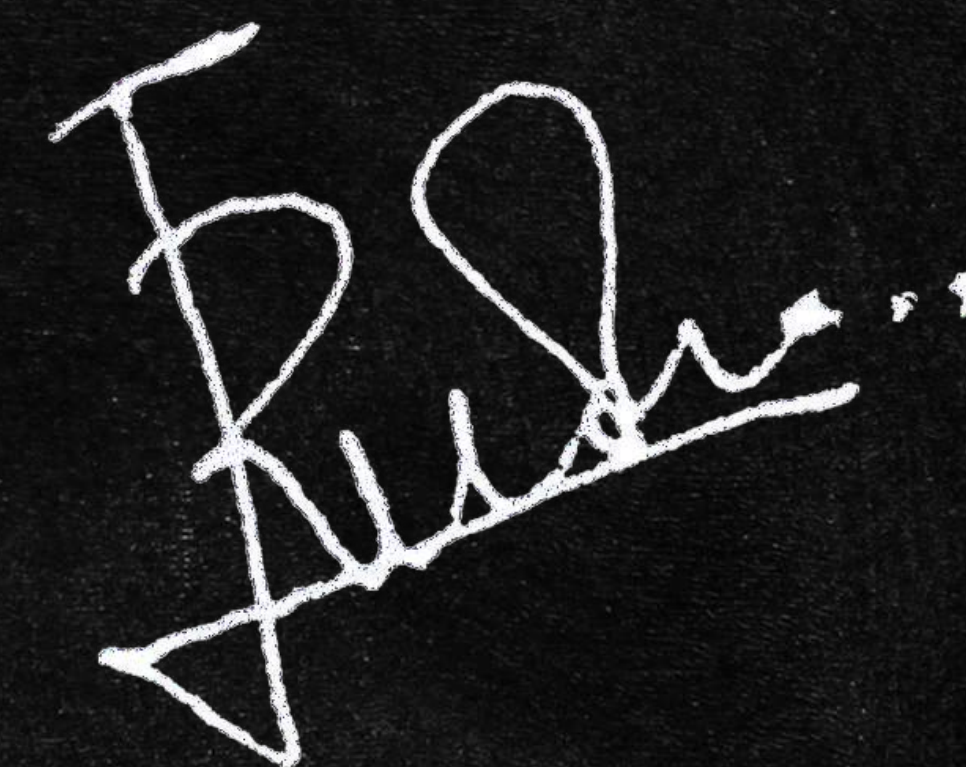# FOREWORD

Sometimes, the butterfly forgets that it was ever a caterpillar. Sometimes, we forget that we have gone through a process of metamorphosis - let go of some pieces of ourselves, and grown some parts of ourselves. Recognizing that we were once caterpillars in some aspects requires that we come face to face with our beliefs and assumptions - often.

How often do we stop to think - what beliefs are driving me today? What assumptions about people and the world am I making today? This is one of the things that makes unlearning difficult - we don't even realise we've changed. When we do realise we've changed though - oh that moment (or couple!) feels what it might feel after a tiring exercise routine: painful but so fulfilling. Your muscles feel sore, but stronger. It takes courage to confront what we believe. It requires us to open up to the possibility that we would be shot down. When I first started working with teams, and being responsible for team members, I was often two steps away from them, intending to give space.

Assuming that people reach out for support when they need support. What this only resulted in was a disconnect between me and my team. This was a big unlearning for me - we don't always know when we need support, and we may not always feel comfortable asking for support. Today, I try to "look on both sides of the road" - try to balance between being too involved, and being close enough to sense when support may be needed. Unlearning is tough. It can be painful. But it is also powerful. It gives you power over your own self, often- as you recognize that you are capable of change and growth. You are capable of moulting your skin and coming out anew. You can be a phoenix. I hope that these stories of unlearning from brave fellow travellers gives you courage and a community to continue unlearning.

Rucha Pande
Chief Operations Officer
Mantra4Change

un\learn

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verb

an exceptional act of courage to let go of a part of one's belief or practices for enriching the journey of growth for self and others. A step towards greater good and oneness with the world.

"Children teach themselves to read/write not because of what or how we teach, but in spite of it."

Anoop Erakkil
Co-Founder
Totto Learning, Kochi

In my first seven years as an educator, I spent over 3000 hours in classrooms, facing children or sitting amidst them. Improving teacher actions, pedagogy, and learning outcomes. And then in 1.5 years, I spent the same 3000 hours with my child as a stay-at-home dad. Observing. Engaging. Unlearning.

I hadn't observed a child outside the classroom in those 7 years with the intent of understanding them. Never researched or found out 'how children learn' before enrolling in a preschool. How learning begins at birth (or even before). Never seen a toddler's communication and exploration of the world without fear. The way they love doing hard things – self-initiated, self-directed, having fun and fully engaged.

Up until then, all I had done was twist and turn and try tips and tricks to 'teach' them. To 'make them learn'.

Two key learnings that guide my work now -

1. Children teach themselves to read/write not because of what or how we teach, but in spite of it. And this, regardless of geography, socioeconomic background, or privileges of birth.
2. Also, irrespective of geography, socioeconomic background, or privileges of birth – children have become the most oppressed category of living beings.

un\learn

"I learnt to stay in the interim and use planning as an effective tool, not hang on to it like it was the only approach to problem solving"

Nisha Subramanian
Educator & Co-Founder
Kanavu, Cuddalore

I grew up watching my parents plan meticulously, every detail of their day, their lives. I have grown up watching them benefit immensely from planning and building discipline to stick to the plans made. My years as a teacher supported me to deepen this belief - I saw that the more time I spent planning, the more rewards I reaped in the classroom. Cut the chase to 2020, when I was a beginner entrepreneur struggling to make sense of the Covid-19 pandemic. Clearly planning was no longer a strength - it made it harder to manage the gap between the plan and reality. It led to a lot of frustration within me and at work.

A lot of introspection, feedback from the team led me to wonder if planning is a problem. Slowly, I unlearned the process of planning and re-learnt the value of being prepared and taking the plunge anyway. Learning the balance took time and soon learnt to not live in the extremes of being super-planned or no-plan. I learnt to stay in the interim and use planning as an effective tool, not hang on to it like it was the only approach to problem solving. This helped us to imagine big possibilities like opening out a Kanavu rural education fellowship - a whole new game for us in our organisation. This is one of the big impacts of unlearning from the past years, for me, as a leader.

"I have begun to develop an appreciation for discourse, collaboration and mutual learning from any individual I come across especially educators."

Vani Balasubramaniam
Educator

I began teaching at the age of 21, and hence my work in low-income education has been replete with unlearning beliefs, practices and mindsets that no longer serve me. Particularly, the shifts I have experienced around collaboration and a sense of community have significantly impacted my perceptions on teaching, learning and impact.

When I began teaching, I operated with a rigid mindset that being an effective teacher meant being independent – this mindset affected the ways in which I developed my knowledge base of curriculum and pedagogy, planned for teaching-learning and transacted my classes.

In the guise of being independent, I lost out on what could have been significant learning I could have secured from educators around me. There was not one moment when I unlearned this mindset, but I can attribute it to experiences I have had and the possibilities these experiences opened up to me over the last few years. I have had the fortune of meeting extremely passionate, interesting and inspiring teachers, teacher educators, academicians and social entrepreneurs through my experiences. While these individuals have inspired me to build a professional sense of community, I have also, through these experiences, begun to develop an appreciation for discourse, collaboration and mutual learning from any individual I come across. While there are structural and systemic changes that make education meaningful, my understanding of praxis rests in what is referred to as micro-improvements.

"Change is the only permanent thing and that awareness opens up new possibilities, especially in teaching everyday"

Usha Rani
Teacher
Universal Public School,
Visakhapatnam

I feel happy to say that I am a teacher. Though I prefer stability and structures, through different life experiences, I learnt that nothing is permanent in this world except change. Pandemic made us realise the impermanence we live in. Especially in teaching. Teaching students virtually was a tough task at hand. It wasn't easy at all in the beginning. But my understanding of impermanence made me think beyond my struggle to get accustomed. My only thought was – "how can I engage students as effectively as I can in my regular classes?" This made me think about how technology can be leveraged in a better way. Then I started engaging students with open ended questions and appropriate digital resources. I feel motivated to be fluid with every batch of students I teach.
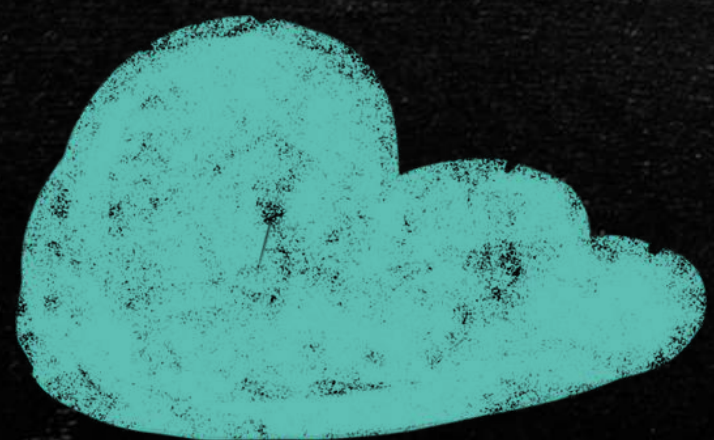
"Children are not empty vessels for us to fill. Each one of them have unique voice and personality"

I entered my classroom believing that "Children are like empty vessels." But I realised that as a teacher, my lesson plans worked the best when I leveraged the prior knowledge of my students. Each kid came with a unique story, interests, strengths, and areas of improvement. By understanding their context, and drawing inspiration from it, I could significantly grab their attention and engage with them at a deeper level to improve their learning outcomes and mine.

Unlearning that children were like empty vessels helped me connect with every child at a deeper level and be a part of their learning experience fully.

Esha Sharma
Educator

"I learnt the importance of asking why more often"

My 2 years as a teacher in the classroom provided me with the greatest unlearning experience one could ask for. In the process of teaching, I learnt the importance of understanding the why behind beliefs, practices and what we consider facts. I didn't look for it or plan towards it.

It happened organically, while I was teaching a lesson one day. One of my students came upto me and asked me why girls were expected to do chores at home and sometimes even at school but boys were not. He did not stop there. Another "why" followed – "Why do we practice this religious belief and that rule etc etc". And there were a million 'why(s)' statement after statement.

Kumari Shalini

Educator
Kraftshala

This was hard hitting for me not only because I didn't know the answers to many of his questions but also because I operated with a belief that critical questions don't occur to young children. That there is an age for asking the right questions.

I learnt that questions don't have an age tag nor is there a perfect time to answer them! This experience of unlearning helped me encourage wonderful questions in my journey as an educator with children and adults alike.

un\learn

"If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn."

Bevara Prasanth
Educator

This quote sums up my unlearning as a teacher. After 6 months into the Teach For India fellowship, I sat with my grade 10 students during study hours. They weren't happy with the way they learned Science and complained to me that it is a boring subject since they have to write all the facts and memorise them. I realised that I am not teaching science the way it has to be taught in the name of board exams. At that moment, I committed to explore and incorporate activity-based learning in my classroom. I joined Catalyst as an intern to develop plans & execute lab activities in schools across Telangana.

During my internship, I realised that most schools don't have adequate infrastructure to kindle scientific curiosity in the students. These experiences led me to co-create a Science Lab with my students in the school I worked at. The beauty of this lab is that students built it (paintings, wooden work, electric work, and wall drawings) within raised funds of less than 30k.

It inspired other TFI and non-TFI schools to take steps toward establishing learning labs as well. Moreover, it positively impacted students towards learning science.
(From a survey of 32 students in the classroom, 65% of them took science groups in Class 11th and 100% of them passed in their board exams).

Most importantly, it helped me better understand that students have hidden potential that sometimes need to be explicitly tapped into.

"The most critical unlearning I had to do was to unlearn that what I believe are 'ideal scenarios' are not so 'ideal' when we consider a country as large as ours!"

Nikhil Nadiger
Social Entrepreneur

My first professional stint was as a teacher in a low-income school teaching 64 primary grade children across two years. I will cherish those years as life defining for me in many ways. The more I grow, the more I reflect upon those two years and derive a fresh perspective / learning.

After two years, as I transitioned into a new role I often found myself at odds with what I was meant to do and what I thought was necessary. I spent many years working with senior leadership of state governments to reform the education system.

I was keen on fundamentally transforming the interactions inside the classrooms and schools, to reform the education system. As I worked with the government machinery to execute those ideas, I learnt it wasn't as simple as that.

My experience, as valuable as it may have been, was also blinding me towards large scale systemic reforms. The gap between a classroom/school intervention to a state intervention is massive. I had to transition from being a doer to a facilitator, from being task oriented to goal orientated, from driving change to catalysing change. This process involved not just learning new ways of working but also unlearning some of the old mindsets.

The most critical unlearning I had to do was to unlearn that what I believe are 'ideal scenarios' are not so 'ideal' when we consider a country as large as ours! We need more people rising ground up to drive contextual and holistic change.

un\learn

"Right and wrong are subject to the context not one person's logic, especially in a classroom"

Srimanth Sattenapalli
Educator & Co-Founder
Swayam Living & Learning Initiative

When I started exploring the idea of learning with freedom in classrooms in 2017, every other teacher and classroom occurred to me as if they were killing the innate creativity of children.

I had multiple conversations with different people in the education space and every time I spoke to them, my lens of looking at their approach disappointed me. In my journey in the Ed sector, I constantly criticised, questioned and blamed the adults around me for doing things a certain way that I felt wasn't best for children. I had justifications to prove that I was coming from the right place.

un\learn

While I had justifications for my emotions, my justifications lacked empathy and oneness with people around me including children.

A year ago, I confronted myself on how I am never one with another human being. When I constantly operated from what is right and wrong – only those who fit into my logic were along with me. I realised that it was my barrier to experiencing the reality of all stakeholders especially educators and children.

I started dropping the standards I had built. I now catch myself and acknowledge my judgments that hinder me from truly understanding the reality of people I'm associated with.

" Even a joyful classroom can seem calm provided children do what they love"

Sunadhini Ravikumar
Educator

When you step into a classroom with 10 year-olds with reading and mathematics at a preschool level, there's quite a bit to unlearn there! How do you undo 4 years of little to no, unstructured learning? When the kids ask you if they can play in the middle of a class, you let them run in the playground for a few minutes, even if that means that everyone else finds this unusual and unsettling. When a kid having only 1 meal a day asks you – "Miss, my head is hurting, can I take rest?", you let them rest at the risk of the HM, another teacher or your manager walking in on a classroom with sleeping children on a school day. It took me months to build a safe and healthy relationship with my students but once we got on track, they were engaged.

We co-created a classroom where everyone could be their honest self.A joyful classroom can look really quiet- that might just mean that the kids love what they're learning! Success can look very different for different children. I learned that by just observing, listening, facilitating, and nudging them towards the results we all knew they needed to achieve, and we accomplished so much more than if we'd stuck to the idea of a conventional classroom. This applies to life as well- there is no formula for success and change, don't be afraid to be different!

"More often than not, our work is not about capacity building but about nurturing intrinsic motivation"

Romila Gillella
Educator & Co-Founder
Bharat Dekho

One of the main unlearning experiences we had as a team was to realise that many people who are working in the system like the teachers, headmasters, sectoral officers, District Education Officers etc do not need technical training. Most of them had capabilities to identify challenges, innovate, and problem solve on a daily basis. All they need sometimes is someone to nurture the intrinsic motivation to do what they do. They need to touch their sense of purpose and responsibilities to continue along this rough path. They need experiential and reflective spaces which trigger them from within. They will take the rest of it forward on their own.

" To grow is to accept chaos and imperfections in you and your audience."

Revathi P
Educator & Director - Culture & HR
Mantra4Change

Having studied in a "conventionally good" school, my mind was filled with preconceived notions on how an ideal classroom should look like. I was in for a shock when the classroom that I was placed in as a teacher was anything but "Ideal". Despite doing everything that I had thought and learnt was the best way to engage a classroom, I failed miserably. My notions were challenged when Tulsi, an 8 year old chirpy girl, single handedly managed to keep my classroom engaged for a whole hour. She accepted the imperfections of her audience and herself. She figured out a way to engage the classroom effectively. I understood that I had to unlearn everything I had learnt to get past my challenges. Slowly I started finding my peace amidst the chaos and that is when I believe that true learning was happening in my class.

"Leadership begins with accepting that you cannot do everything. Together we do more, achieve more."

Reslee Elsa Varghese

Educator & Strategist - Communications

Mantra4Change

Through my journey as a teacher and a teacher trainer, I came in with a mindset that teacher – "teaches" and trainer "trains". I saw the whole concept of learning as a broadcast mechanism, a download portal. One person teaches and others listen, one person coaches and others develop. A one way road of all sorts. This mindset made me operate in task heavy ways. I would do a lot of work on my own to avoid errors, save time and to stay aligned with my imagination of perfect outcomes! Burn out was the only outcome of this mindset before I chose to slowly open my mind and see how much I was learning when I was mentoring, how much I was transforming as an Educator when I observed classrooms and the amazing teachers in there. I could see that learning is a mutual process.

Not only did this unlearning help me believe in people and delegate responsibilities but also gave me the nudge to ask for help when I need it.

Similar experiences followed in my role as a storyteller as well. My team at Mantra catalysed my unlearning experience in more ways than one. I now see mutual learning and collaboration as a precursor to effective leadership that allows people, teams and organisations to grow exponentially.

"I unlearn everytime I teach my students. It pushes me to explore new methods, creative ways to engage with them"
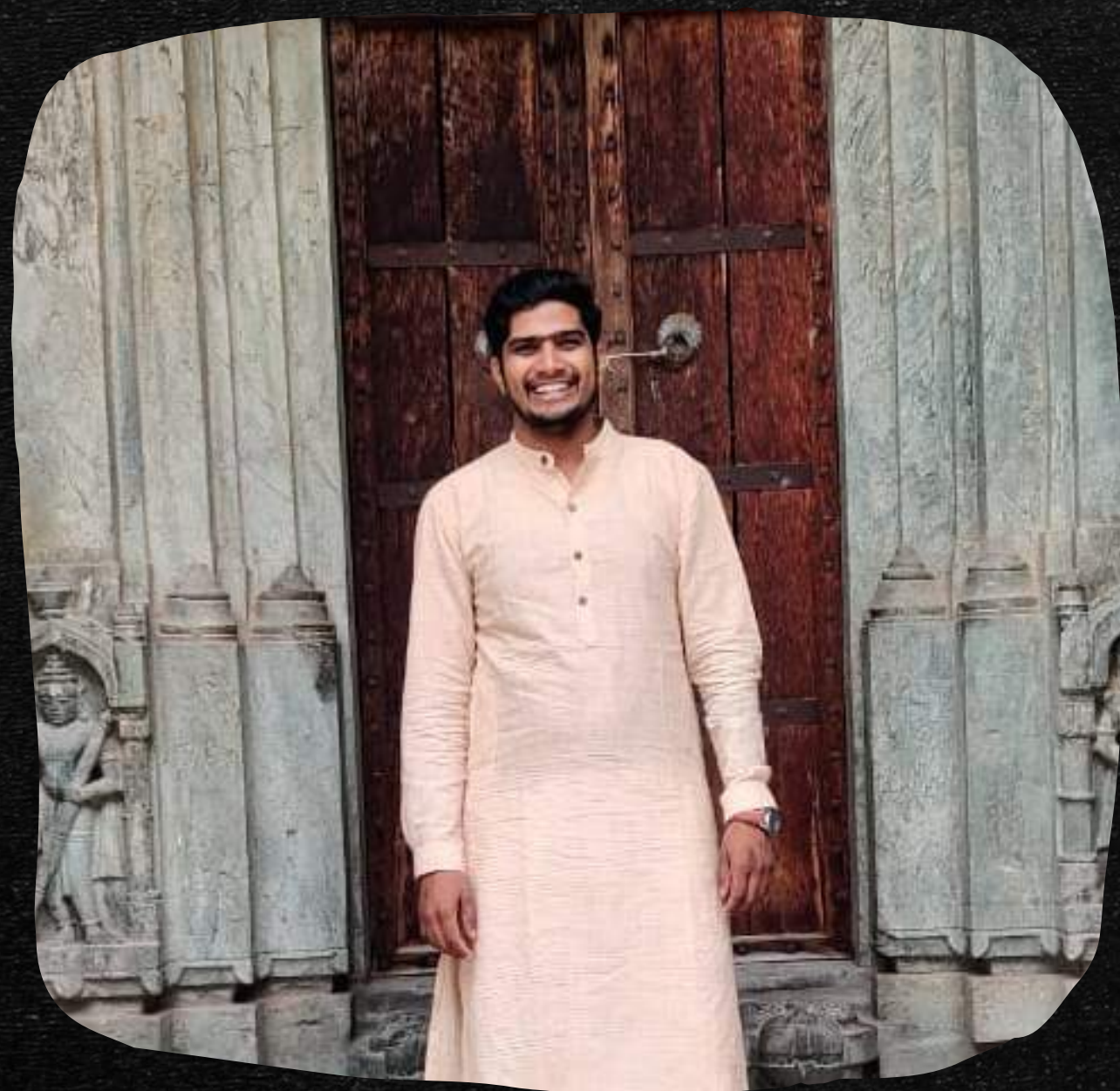
Sameer Nainawat
Educator
Ashvattha Learning Communities

Working with Ashvattha I'm learning how to become a teacher. Sometimes, I struggle to place my role. Am I a teacher, mentor, or facilitator? I think I cannot allow new learning without unlearning my past experiences, beliefs and conditioning. At our learning centre, I attempt to create a learning space for students of age 9 to 12 years.

One day I was preparing a lesson plan on plants, and all of a sudden I asked myself "what if students ask me what is inside the plant?". I thought I would tell them that plants are made of cells, but then I realised that talking about cells would just be another story for them. They should know the truth. Why can't I show them a cell?

I saw a cell for the first time in class 12th. I did not want my students to wait that long to experience scientific wonder and curiosity.

I tried making a microscope with magnifying glasses, after watching a lot of DIY (Do it yourself) videos, and failures. Finally I succeeded after two days. I made a microscope. Making a microscope made me understand the concept better and obviously opened up new possibilities for being a better educator. I unlearnt that learning is for my students in our learning centre!

"Both teaching and administration can be done better with a collaborative approach. Authority does not catalyse learning."

Dr.M.Anitha
Educator
Machilipattanam

"Unlearning" is a word that anyone would dread as it would primarily require us to acknowledge that we need to change.. Even more so seen in the teaching profession as we learn from a young age that a teacher is the supreme source of knowledge. In my personal experience, it has been a tough challenge to shift from the ideology of teacher-centric education to child-centric education. There have been multiple instances where it was crucial to hand over the responsibility of learning to the child. Being a perfectionist, it gave me peace to control the knowledge transfer and how it is done in a classroom environment.

But at one point, it was unavoidable for me to accept that every child learns in a unique manner and it is my duty to play the role of a facilitator and give them freedom to question, experiment and learn their own way.

Same goes with my administrative role where I would micromanage the teachers and this would end up with too much work stress as well as no learning that is evident in the teachers. That is where I had to unlearn the authoritative role and re-learn the collaborative aspect in both teaching and administration.

"Teaching is a joyous experience and the quest for perfection only robs us of that blissful experience."

Ever since I remember I've always wanted to become a teacher. I remember coming home from school everyday and imitating my teachers. That's what most of my play time would consist of.

And finally when I became a teacher, I wanted to be no less than perfect. But over these years I have unlearned that you don't have to be a perfect teacher for your students. Students don't need a perfect teacher. They want someone who they look forward to learning with. They don't care if their teacher made a mistake. By striving to be perfect, one shouldn't forget to strive. Teaching is a joyous experience and perfection only robs us of that joy.

Divya Pagah

Teacher

MJPAP Residential Institutions

" I wasn't "teaching" them.
They were "learning" from me."

Rakishma M

Educator and and
Research & Design Lead
Mantra4Change

During my two years in a classroom environment, I got to learn with 32 brilliant 6-year-olds. I walked into my classroom with a strong belief that I would teach my students many interesting things they are curious about, teach them how to be kind, how to support their friends when in need, how to question injustice, how to treat everyone with respect, how to imbibe important life values and mindsets that will help them become better human beings for the world.

Over so many hours of formal instruction on subjects and topics beyond, doing projects together, tracking them on values they show in the classroom, I was under the dubious impression that I was "teaching" them something - about themselves and about life in general.

Until I realised, I wasn't "teaching" them. They were "learning" from me.
And there is an ocean of difference between the two.
My students imitated me more than they would listen to me - from how I spoke to them and others - inside and outside the classroom, from what tone and language I used in different situations and the state of mind I exhibited. They act as little mirrors. They showed me, myself, reflecting my actions, moods and at times even my thoughts.

Fellowship made me unlearn that children need to be taught. Children need to be shown the right examples. A lot of "values" and "mindsets" we often pretend to teach children are innate in them. Eventually as they grow, they learn from adults how to grow out of it. They learn to discriminate, disregard, disrespect as they grow, from observing and absorbing from adults and situations around them.
More than having the hope of teaching children what we think is right, we need to constantly and consciously unlearn ourselves and remember to not teach them what is wrong.

"Creating disruptive models that focus on the overall development and wellbeing of the teachers is far more important than capacity building exercises done in isolation"

Ananya Upadhyay
Educator & Senior Academic Coordinator
Peepul

When I stepped into the education sector my only understanding about education inequity was that "In low income private schools or Government schools, teachers don't teach and hence students don't learn anything."

As I worked with the students, teachers and school systems closely, I started empathising with teachers and my understanding grew to this – teachers want to teach but the system is designed in a way that they don't have enough time to carry out their primary responsibility, i.e, teaching, efficiently.

un\learn

As an Educator now, I constantly work with teachers and teacher coaches to create a conducive environment for government teachers and ensure they are heard, encouraged, acknowledged. With their well-being taken care of, it is natural that they keep children at the centre of what they do because at the heart of it, they do care about what they do. Creating disruptive models that focus on the overall development and wellbeing of the teachers as opposed to just training will create a dent in the system and in doing so, take us closer to achieving vision of India through our children.

"Every child deserves a teacher who isn't ready to give up on them."

Robert Mate

Educator

Teach for North East

I come from one of the most challenging yet inspiring terrains of India – Manipur (Not just any place confused for in the North Eastern Belt) I always considered Public Education as a gateway to rote learning. I barely knew the challenges and potential that the children from low income communities possess.

However, my experience as an educator with Teach For North East (TFNE) taught me that every child can grow in unique ways if the system is committed to provide the right environment and ample opportunities.

My proof of learning rested in the behaviour of the child, how they acted in the schools. I believed that teachers give up on students who can't be taught any further before I unlearned this mindset and realised that "every child deserves a teacher who isn't ready to give up on them" and more so when socio-political situations are challenging in the geography.

"The choice of tool must be guided by the task at hand."

Varun Deshpande

Alum

Teach for India

When faced with the question - what values should I try to inculcate in my students, I didn't think much before deciding. It was pretty self-evident. I thought they should be the values that my parents and teachers tried inculcating in me when I was a student. Those values and mindsets which made sense at that point to my social preconditioning. They would not make much sense to my students who were facing very different battles from mine when I was their age. The difference was the sheer amount of disadvantage they have had right from their birth. I had to pause and ask myself, do I want to put in the effort to try teaching them what I think is right

(which is largely a product of my own upbringing and was of little relevance to their situation) or something that will help them thrive in their environment without compromising on basic human dignity. I chose the latter. It helped me and my students to be grounded in reality and yet have sight fixed on the next best thing. I have come to believe since then that the values and mindsets are tools that help students succeed. The choice of tool must be guided by the task at hand. There is no one tool that helps in all tasks and as educators it is our duty to be comfortable with unknown tools if the tasks(student welfare) demand it.

"The world isn't so bad after all! To love and kindness."

Divya Bharti
Educator & Learning Experience Designer
FourthRev

I spent most of my life with a view that people are out there to get you, they are only waiting for an opportunity to see you fall. In short, the world is a really unfair and unsafe space until one day, this day. Me and a few of my students went on a trip to Pondicherry and owing to the traffic enroute, we came back quite late (at around 1 AM). I spent the entire return journey wondering and worrying where I was going to stay that night as my hostel curfew was 10 pm. When I got off the bus, I saw a lot of parents had come to pick their students and Selva Balaji's mother comes to me and says, "Divya miss, it is too late, consider that I am your mother, would you come and stay at our place, and head out tomorrow morning, if you don't mind?".

I had a knot in my stomach just that moment, a variety of thoughts, is this safe, can I trust her, would they be able to accommodate me, this is such a huge risk. It took around a minute for these thoughts to subside and my trust for people to resurface. I suddenly felt a wave of love and warmth and followed Balaji and her. I ate a very yummy prawn curry. There were three pieces of prawns and I got two and Balaji one. I was mostly embarrassed of myself for doing that, but Balaji was only happy to share. I then slept on the floor that night and till today, I would call it one of my safest and most peaceful sleep overs ever. This experience transformed how I perceived the world- From it is unsafe, to maybe it is not so bad ☺ To love and kindness!

un\learn

#22

"I unlearned that pedagogy / content-based training is sufficient to make a good teacher. Any effort to develop teachers should address the teacher as an individual (personality, interests, energy et al)."

Vinusha Venkatesh
Educator|Learning & Development Manager
Ramana Vidyalaya, Chennai

When one has never taught, it is easy to reduce a teacher's role and responsibility to that which is most commonly visible to everyone; delivering some knowledge in the classroom. Students, parents, trainers, administration, policymakers etc who see only the tip of the iceberg, seldom understand the complexity of the profession until they experience it first-hand. Once I started to teach, I could experience the sheer weight of the responsibility and I don't mean in terms of the hours of work required outside the classroom (research, planning, correction etc).

Being an effective teacher is not just about good teacher practices, but a conscious effort to be the best version of the person one can be, because it's a role where it's nearly impossible to separate the person from the professional. I unlearned that pedagogy / content-based training is sufficient to make a good teacher. Any effort to develop teachers should address the teacher as an individual (personality, interests, energy et al).

As someone who is now working as a teacher educator with first time teachers, I find myself approaching their professional development in a holistic manner i.e. developing the teacher as a person rather than just specific teaching skills. This includes being sensitive to their learning styles, time and energy levels as well.

"Looking at the teacher while they teach and learning in the classroom are two different worlds."

Archana M

Research and Design Lead
Mantra4Change

Hey you (name of the child), look at me.

If you are more interested in what they are doing than the lesson, leave the classroom.

Stop staring out the window.

Stop playing with the geometry box, please!

How many of you have heard your teacher tell you something like this or have told your students something like this while teaching?

Many of us would probably believe that children who do not look at the teacher while she/he is teaching are not listening or learning anything in the classroom.

Let me tell you, I used to believe that children needed to look at the teacher while learning. Otherwise, they are not paying attention. Through my years of observing classrooms I unlearned that belief.

I used to question students who looked outside the classroom or did something else while I was teaching. Believe me, their responses have surprised me. I had heard similar stories but didn't believe them until I had hands-on experience.

Our beliefs are more often than not our biases! It is okay to unlearn even some of the most concrete biases we hold onto as if they are a part of us or who we could become. Unlearning allows space for new possibilities. Since every child/person learns in unique ways, I've learned not to be quick in my judgments.

"I realized that every child has a special potential and contributes in some way."

Bidyarani Mainaly

Content Development Lead

Mantra4Change

Since I was a young child, I saw my teachers standing in front of the classroom and repeating the textbook as is. As I became older, I believed that this is how learning and instruction should take place in the classroom. Children listen while teachers teach.

Then one day I was given a chance to teach children. I was all prepared for that class, I started teaching a topic, tried to give my best but their faces were clueless. I was disheartened. When I reflected back on my planning, I realised that I had neglected to add any activities that would allow children to exercise their own imagination and creativity in the classroom.

I didn't give them time to think or connect it to their everyday lives.

Next day I went with an open mind and asked them to create a story of their own and share. Their stories mesmerised me. They were all very imaginative. I realised that every child has a special potential and contributes in some way. As a teacher or educator, it is our duty to assist children in realising their potential and bringing out the best in them. I unlearned that the teacher is not the main player of the classroom but students are.

Quoting my favourite line- 'If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn'.

"Transitions when done in synchronisation with students has a stronger impact"

Deepthi TVN
Fellow
Teach For India

Pandemic has brought in a shift from traditional classroom to virtual mode of teaching. During this time, we had to unlearn the practices implemented in traditional classroom to virtual ways. The technology integration among teachers' community was and is a huge transition. Community led practices do help in some ways.

The ecosystem of support from student leaders has played a greater role in realising the true potential of virtual learning than any other capacity building initiative.

As a teacher myself, I unlearnt that I own their learning experiences. I see how it is a collaborative effort.

"Most importantly, there were many instances where I learnt from my children each and every day, which mended my attitude towards life."

Malathi Kandasamy
Former Educator
Madhi Foundation

As an educator, I thought setting higher expectations for children's academic excellence without fulfilling their basic foundational literacy was absurd. But support from my peers, changes in their classroom especially reading fluency of students inspired me to change my perspective. It took me almost six months to introspect myself and understand the learning nature of every child in class; tweaking the pedagogy catering to their needs. It helped me build confidence in children.

un\learn

Most importantly, there were many instances where I learnt from my students each and every day, which mended my attitude towards life. Since then I have consciously tried to shed my biases and believe in the unseen potential of every child and my role to help them realise it!

" So I've learned to question why they behave in a certain way and then help them overcome it. "

Ragunath R

Research and Design Lead
Mantra4Change

More often than not classrooms become incubators of behaviour improvement and management than a place to learn. Throughout my childhood, I was constantly told that I don't comply with the class rules and punished as well. Neither them nor me understood why behind my behaviour and how to improve it.

I saw a change in my energy when I started participating in extracurricular activities and took initiatives. I was introduced to the concept of leadership first hand through this experience. I developed a keen sense of awareness about myself and the world.

I realised the source of my disruptive behaviour – lack of attention & opportunity to show strengths and learn more.
Leadership has so many shapes and forms especially in a child's world. All they need is someone to believe in them and leverage their strengths!

I've learned that 'no child is a bad child and that every action has a reason. So I've learned to question why they behave in a certain way and then help them overcome it.

un\learn

"Nevertheless, you learn from the unsuccessful attempt and work towards creating better solutions."

Mohit Dev
Head of Operations
Shiksharth

Failures are the stepping stones toward success. This learning came to me the hard way. I had to learn that as I earned more experience, one must also experience failure if one wants to succeed. The pressure I felt during this period worked as a motivation to hone my skills and knowledge to adapt to new situations, which will eventually help me pave the way towards the peak of my goals.

Being a teacher for students from low-income and conflict-driven regions, sometimes the challenges we face are incomprehensible to the larger audience.

And most of the time, you fail. Nevertheless, you learn from the unsuccessful attempt and create better solutions to provide relevant education to the children for whom the idea of being educated is still a new concept.

"Children, often don't understand the meaning of understand"

Santosh More

Co-Founder

Mantra4Change

Biggest of my unlearning experiences have happened in classrooms. I was teaching in a classroom for two years and for the first couple of months, after every lesson I used to ask them if they understood the lesson well. And everytime they used to nod their heads. But individual interaction with my students helped me understand that they didn't understand the meaning of understand (Reality of foundational literacy and numeracy in India).

I think over the many years in the education space – I have held this learning very close to my heart and extrapolated it to connect with people at a deeper level.

I do not assume that they understand my stance. I do not assume that I understood them either!From a world of assuming to asking to understanding , this experience with a bunch of 6 year olds transformed my beliefs and practices to a large extent.

un\learn

Mantra4Change unlearned too!

Over the last 10 years, our team tried many iterations of systemic transformation models. We asked our selves - What works? Where does it work the best? Do solutions that work can always be scaled?

The challenging journey that began with 3-4 schools in Karnataka 10 years ago taught us many things, made us unlearn almost every mindset we held close to our programs. But the most important unlearning we had to do in order to #solveforscale was to believe in the process of #Microimprovements. We had to unlearn that Systemic transformation had anything to do with complex solutions. We had to believe in School as a unit of change and school leaders as critical changemakers. Over the last couple of years, we have learnt to refocus on creating Microimprovements for Mega Impact along with our partners and stakeholders

un\learn

Dear Reader,

Greetings to you!

Sometimes educational practices need to change either because they are not working, because approaches to education have shifted to meet new goals or because technology has changed the landscape. But adapting to new ideas often requires that old notions be unlearned. Unlearning, however, is often difficult because changing long-held ideas is more personal for educators and can feel like a threat to their sense of identity.

Letting go of old methods and ideas about education, discipline, and classroom management can increase innovation and lead to more student-centered approaches. Unlearning can also involve rejecting old biases and stereotypes that may have affected conscious or unconscious attitudes toward students.

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This was our small attempt to bring before you the stories from the experiences of teachers, educators, mentors, and school leaders who believed in unlearning rudimentary and lousy practices to enrich the learning experience for every child. We hope that you had a great reading experience going through our first edition of "The Unlearn Series - Extraordinary stories of Unlearning".

The Editorial Team
Mantra4Change

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A Decade Of Catalysing Education Leadership

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