



The
Un/Learn
Series

SEASON 2

Foreword



Jayasudha Roselet

**Director - Ecosystem Initiatives
EduMentum**

Being an educator is an ever-evolving journey of being a learner. As Henry David Thoreau once said, *“When any real progress is made, we unlearn and learn anew what we thought we knew before.”*

As an educator who has strongly believed in the idea of teaching as the art of facilitating learning, the journey for me has truly been one of developing perspectives. Spending time with young children for a couple of years made me assume that I know how kids think, feel and work. But parenting has tested my true understanding. Being a mom of two preschoolers has been my biggest journey of learning and even more of unlearning the myths around the nature of children and how to engage with them. I have unpacked and repackaged most of my beliefs to provide support in a form that makes sense to my own children. I've realized that I could do more damage to them than benefit by teaching them rather than letting them learn.

Foreword

Relearning can be tough, but potentially worthwhile and the best way to nourish oneself.

This compilation is an attempt to bring to you many such personal stories of change in perspectives. After all, isn't life all about discovering and evolving as a more informed version of oneself? We hope you enjoy and even resonate with the ideas of relearning shared in this series.

In the spirit of unlearning and continuous learning...

Yours truly,
Jayasudha





unlearn

/ʌnˈleɪn/

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.



Deepak Dhyani

Educator

Hans Cultural Centre

“The unlearning process was challenging. My mind had to constantly battle the deeply ingrained belief, which often resurfaced when faced with adversity.”

I once believed that teaching abilities were an innate gift given to a select few, making them naturally brilliant educators. Little did I know that this belief would come to impact my role as an educator in ways I could not foresee.

My unlearning began with a realization – the realization that my belief was not only limiting but also false. My own venture into the world of teaching triggered it. As I stood before my first class of students, I couldn't help but notice that some of my students, although lacking in the apparent natural talent for teaching, could develop practical teaching skills through dedication and effort.

This observation was the catalyst that shattered my long-held belief. I began to question the notion that shaped my approach to education. Was teaching an innate quality, or could it be nurtured and developed like any other skill? The unlearning process was challenging. My mind had to constantly battle the deeply ingrained belief, which often resurfaced when faced with adversity. To overcome these challenges, I talked to fellow educators with different perspectives and reflected upon my experiences. Slowly but surely, my belief began to shift. I realized that the key to effective teaching lay not in inherent talent but in nurturing a deep passion for the profession.

Gradually, I transformed my teaching approach. Instead of assuming that some were "born" teachers, I focused on bringing about a passion for teaching within myself and my students. The impact was profound. My classroom became an engaging environment where students who initially struggled with teaching concepts began to see themselves as confident and effective educators.

Unlearning this myth not only empowered my students but also enriched my own teaching style. It highlighted the significance of mentorship and the continuous journey of learning. I had unlearned one of my most limiting beliefs, opening up a world of possibilities in education.



#2



Kanchana Kumari Sahu

Teacher

GCD High School, Rayagada

"I feared that if I became too friendly, my students might not take me seriously, and discipline would fall by the wayside."

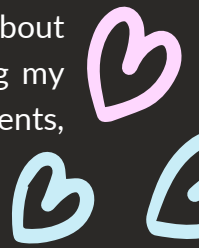
In beginning of my teaching career, I held a belief that I now consider outdated. I believed that as a teacher, I couldn't be friends with my students. I thought strictness was the only way to ensure they took my instructions seriously. I piled on writing assignments and insisted on rigid adherence, including reading aloud in class.

The realization to unlearn this practice didn't happen overnight. It crept in gradually. I began to sense that my stern approach was not yielding the results I had hoped for. I couldn't pinpoint a specific event that triggered this change, but I knew I needed to evolve.

The challenges I faced during this unlearning process were real. I feared that if I became too friendly, my students might not take me seriously, and discipline would fall by the wayside. Another challenge was suppressing my frustration when students failed to complete assignments. I realized that this emotional labor was an integral part of teaching. I learned to keep a happy face.

It took me almost six years to unlearn this experience but I saw change. My students started to see me not just as a teacher but as a friend and mentor. I began to explain the rationale behind assignments, and I delivered instructions with a smile. If they couldn't complete a task, I didn't scold; instead, I inquired about the reasons and offered support. Unlearning my strict personality had a profound impact on the learning experience of my students. The classroom environment transformed into a positive space where communication happened. Students felt comfortable opening up about their challenges, and more of them completed their assignments. I had learned that being a friend to my students didn't diminish my authority; it enhanced it. It fostered trust, understanding, and a sense of partnership in the learning journey.

In the end, I discovered that teaching is not just about imparting knowledge but also about building relationships and understanding the unique needs of each student. Unlearning my strict teacher persona enriched not only my teaching but also the lives of my students, making our educational journey more enjoyable and effective.



#3



Yasha Shivhare

Teacher

Adani Vidya Mandir

“Every student is capable of understanding and enjoying Maths when given the right tools and encouragement”

I held a belief that Mathematics was an enigmatic subject, understood only by the select few who possessed a unique genetic gift. This notion deeply influenced my role as an educator, creating a barrier between my students and Mathematics. The turning point came when I was offered the opportunity to teach Maths to fourth and fifth graders. Initially, I hesitated, intimidated by the very subject I had deemed impenetrable. However, as I took on the challenge, something inside me began to shift.

The realisation to unlearn this belief was gradual but profound. I started searching for innovative ways to make mathematics accessible and enjoyable for all my students. I understood that maths wasn't reserved for the genetically privileged; it was a subject that anyone could grasp with the right approach.

Challenges did arise during this unlearning process. To prove my belief wrong, I had to consistently seek out activities and pedagogical methods that would make maths not just understandable but also fun. It was all about experimentation and creativity.

Unlearning my belief bore fruit when I saw a positive impact on my students. Many of them had once feared maths exams, but with new pedagogy, they quickly grasped the concepts and overcame their apprehensions. I adapted exam instructions to a language they understood and provided guidance during the tests. My students were not only fearless but also excelled in Mathematics.

Unlearning the myth of the inaccessibility of Maths not only benefited my students but also changed my entire approach to teaching. It taught me that every student is capable of understanding and enjoying Maths when given the right tools and encouragement. Unlearning made me realise that as teachers, we have the power to break down barriers and open doors to learning for all our students, no matter their initial beliefs or fears.





“When we empower our students and trust in their abilities, they can surpass our expectations and emerge as confident and capable individuals”



Purna Mukesh

**Mentor & Educator
KidsWhoKode**

As an educator and mentor, I had held a certain belief for years – that when it came to important presentations, sticking to the practised plan was the only way to ensure success. This belief was put to the test by a student named Asha, and it ultimately transformed my perspective on teaching and mentoring.

Asha had diligently prepared for an online event, investing an entire week in perfecting her presentation. However, just five minutes before the event was scheduled to begin, she approached me with an unexpected request. She wanted to present her material entirely in Hindi, a deviation from our meticulously planned script. In the past, I would have likely convinced her to stick to the rehearsed format, believing it was the safest choice.

But this time, I thought to keep aside what I believe and go by what my mentee, Asha is confident about. We were running short on time, Asha had a strong command of Hindi, and, most importantly, I trusted her abilities. In that crucial moment, I decided to place my trust in Asha and her instincts. I believed that if I told her I trusted her, she would rise to the occasion. I told her that even in the event of a mistake, it was okay, and she should apologise to the audience and move forward confidently, with the knowledge that I had her back.

Asha's presentation was nothing short of outstanding. Her confidence in delivering her message in Hindi was inspiring, and it left a lasting impact on the audience. This experience taught not only Asha but also everyone involved the importance of taking risks, and trusting individual instinct, and not succumbing to preconceived notions of a prescribed format.

Unlearning the belief that presentations must adhere rigidly to a plan and trusting my student's voice transformed my mentoring approach. It reinforced the idea that school is the ideal place for children to take risks, make mistakes, and learn from them. Most importantly, it taught me that when we empower our students and trust in their abilities, they can surpass our expectations and emerge as confident and capable individuals. I'm learning valuable lessons from my students every day, and I couldn't be more grateful for it.



#5



Divyah Paga

**Teacher
MJPAPBCWREIS,
Andhra Pradesh**

“My students no longer worry about seeking external validation or fitting into a predefined mould of a teacher's favourite.”

I unlearned a practice that has silently pervaded classrooms for generations - the concept of the "teacher's pet." This notion, while never something I actively practised, had a subtle impact on my role as an educator. It was only as I ventured deeper into my profession that I recognized the potential harm it could inflict on a child's self-esteem, particularly during their formative years.

My realisation to unlearn this practice was slow. As a student, I had never been the teacher's pet. I was the quiet one, an average student with thick glasses, timid, and shy. I didn't fit the traditional image of the teacher's favourite student. It wasn't until I stood in front of my own students that I grasped the consequences of having favourites or showing explicit favouritism. I saw firsthand how it could impact not only the teacher's pets but also the other students in the class.

Unlearning this deeply ingrained belief posed its own set of challenges. It required self-awareness and reflection on my part as an educator. It meant consciously avoiding any semblance of favouritism and treating each student as an individual with their unique strengths and challenges.

The unlearning experience impacted my classroom positively. My students no longer worry about seeking external validation or fitting into a predefined mould of a teacher's favourite. They understand that they have the space and opportunity to shine in their own way, regardless of their academic prowess or extroverted personalities.

By unlearning the concept of the teacher's favourite, I've created a more inclusive and nurturing learning environment. It's a space where every student feels valued and supported, where they can grow and thrive without the burden of seeking approval. It's a reminder that, as educators, our role is not just to impart knowledge but also to foster a sense of belonging and self-worth in every student who walks through our classroom doors.



#6



Ankit Agrawal

**School Principal
iTeach Schools**

“Behaviour is a skill that can be taught, just like any other subject. I began to view behavioural mistakes in the same way I would view a Maths mistake.”

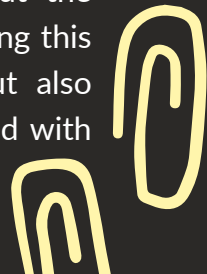
The biggest barrier to my effectiveness in the classroom was my belief that good behaviour should come naturally when intentions are right, and I felt frustrated when students didn't meet my expectations, especially when I saw them off-task or engaging in inappropriate behaviour. This mindset led to various challenges in my role as an educator: I often felt guilty for overreacting in certain situations. My quick irritation made it difficult for me to truly enjoy my role as a teacher. I didn't employ the right strategies to positively influence my students. I found myself waiting for a magical solution instead of proactively addressing behaviour issues. My students' trust in me began to erode due to my inconsistent responses to their behaviour.

The turning point came when I read a book called "LOST AT SCHOOL." It shed light on the reasons behind students' challenging behaviours, explaining that many of them lack essential skills and self-awareness. It helped me realise that behaviour is a skill that can be taught, just like any other subject. I began to view behavioural mistakes in the same way I would view a Maths mistake.

The unlearning process came with its own set of challenges, primarily the natural instinct to revert to old habits during difficult situations. However, I overcame this by breaking down character into measurable skills and actions, making it easier for both me and my students to reflect continuously and become conscious of our behaviours.

Over the period of time, my classroom culture shifted towards one of achievement, where students worked hard, supported each other, and celebrated each other's successes. This transformation extended beyond the classroom, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration during school competitions.

Today, as a mentor to fellow educators, I pass on the lessons I've learned about the importance of teaching behaviour as a skill. By unlearning my old beliefs and embracing this new perspective, I've not only built a stronger student culture in my school but also empowered others to do the same. Character, like any other subject, can be cultivated with time and effort.



#7



Nilima Sharma

**Former Teacher
St Stephen's School, Ajmer**

The crux of my unlearning was realizing that students' career choices should not be limited by societal biases, and it has nothing to do with their intelligence.

I hail from a small town in Rajasthan where it was common to see children struggling to get into a few streams like medical, engineering or CA as they were not aware about the ample upcoming career opportunities. As a teacher and parent, I was also part of the society which was conditioned to believe that Science was superior to other subjects like Humanities.

I realised I was wrong in this belief and got the perfect opportunity to change it when the school decided to try out career guidance and counselling sessions for students. I immediately volunteered! I was working as a computer teacher but this quickly became my personal project. I actively reached out to acquaintances from offbeat professions to interact with the students of Classes XI and XII.

However, this was around 12 years back when such sessions were not very common, thus it came with its own challenges. I remember a woman IPS officer declining to interact with the students because she thought it was beneath her station and not worth her time. Similarly, it was difficult to build acceptance in parents towards new career prospects for their kids. It was a long journey of perseverance and resilience, and I couldn't have done it without the support from the school.

I am no longer working as a teacher but I still meet students who remember and appreciate those interactions. The practice was not only helpful for the students to find their area of interest, but also an opportunity for me to change my perspective and grow with the times.

The crux of my unlearning was realising that students' career choices should not be limited by societal biases, and it has nothing to do with their intelligence. Whether you aspire to be a doctor, engineer, artist, or accountant, knowing the right path and having access to guidance can make all the difference in achieving your dreams.





Sushant Kumar

Prog. Communications Lead
Mantra4Change

“As an educator, my responsibility extends beyond academic knowledge. I need to nurture empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity among my students”

As an educator, I once held a belief that many in my profession may be familiar with: that the best way to handle sensitive issues in the classroom was to ignore them, to brush them under the carpet. Whether it was a casteist remark or a slur, my approach was to simply carry on with the lesson plan and hope the issue would resolve itself.

My realisation to unlearn this practice occurred when I was interning in a low-fee private school in Ranchi. A group of students had written a religious quote on the notebooks of their peers from a minority religion after a heated fight during a football match. This act was a deliberate targeting of students from a minority background, causing emotional distress. It was no longer just a typical schoolyard fight; it was a matter of communal insensitivity that demanded immediate attention. How? I didn't know!

This incident made me recognize that, as an educator, my responsibility extended beyond academic knowledge. I needed to nurture empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity among my students. I couldn't simply ignore such issues anymore.

The unlearning process came with its own set of challenges. Bringing sensitive issues to the school administration wasn't easy, as they were concerned about the school's reputation. But I persevered. Professionally, I learned how to navigate conflicts within the classroom, particularly when students had differing views on social science topics. I created a safe environment where students could share their perspectives, even if they differed from the majority. The most valuable tool I acquired was the ability to facilitate dialogue.

Within a month of implementing these changes, I witnessed a transformation in my students. They became more inclusive and appreciative of the fact that we could all be different in our beliefs, practices, and appearances while coexisting harmoniously. There was a sense of fraternity in the classroom.

Unlearning the practice of 'brushing sensitive issues under the carpet' not only positively affected my students but also transformed my teaching approach. I now understand the power of addressing difficult conversations head-on, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic classroom environment. This experience has not only made me a better educator but also a believer in the importance of dialogue.





Bindu

**Teach Manager
U&I**

“As an educator, my responsibility extends “I sought guidance from colleagues and asked if they also felt this when they started their teaching journey. Sharing and listening to their experiences helped me a lot.”

As an educator, the outdated belief I held was the expectation that all students should progress at the same pace and meet the same standards of excellence simultaneously. This belief had a detrimental impact on my role, as it led to frustration and a lack of empathy for my students' individual needs and abilities.

The trigger for my realisation to unlearn this practice came from the mounting frustration I experienced when my students struggled to keep up with my expectations. There wasn't a specific event, but rather a gradual understanding that my rigid approach wasn't working.

While I was unlearning, I encountered several challenges. It was difficult to let go of the idea that all my energy and excitement are not giving me the results that I have already set in my head. However, I overcame these challenges by reflecting on my teaching methods and embracing a more adaptable and patient approach. I sought guidance from colleagues and asked if they also felt this when they started their teaching journey. Sharing and listening to their experiences helped me a lot.

One significant example of how unlearning positively affected the learning experience for my students was when I was teaching language. Previously, I had expected all students to grasp the concepts of the English language and start speaking in the language. However, after unlearning this belief, I began to provide more individualised support. For some students, this meant additional one-on-one sessions, while for others, it meant encouraging them to explore the language. The students used to mimic me. It was annoying at first but then I realised that by doing so, they are speaking the language and getting comfortable with it.

As a result, I noticed improvement in their speaking abilities and overall confidence. Students who had previously struggled were now excelling because they felt supported and empowered to learn. This experience influenced my teaching approach significantly. I adopted a more flexible and student-centred approach in all subjects, focusing on their growth and understanding their unique learning needs rather than imposing my own rigid expectations.



#10



Harikrishnan H

**Research & Design Lead
Mantra4Change**

"I learnt that being an all-knowing figure wasn't the key. Instead, it is important to present myself as someone who also makes mistakes and is continually learning, just like my students."

As I began my teaching journey with the TFI fellowship, I had this belief that a teacher must be a reservoir of knowledge, always ready to answer any question thrown their way. I was determined to stuff my brain with every detail about the topics I wanted to teach. And yet, despite my best efforts, I found myself making errors in the classroom.

But what I feared would be humiliating turned out to be a profound learning experience. From then on, I realised that being an all-knowing figure wasn't the key. Instead, presenting myself as someone who also makes mistakes and is continually learning, just like my students, transformed my classroom dynamic.

It opened the doors for more students to approach me with their questions and problems, seeing me as a trusted mentor on their learning journey. This shift in perspective led me to start seeking feedback from my students. I asked them what they liked and what they thought I could improve. Over my two years as a teacher, I received invaluable feedback from my students that allowed me to refine my teaching methods to better suit my students' needs.

To sum it up, my teaching journey has taught me that it's not just about students learning from the teacher; it's a shared journey where we learn from each other. By presenting yourself as a fellow learner to your students, you can break down barriers and create a classroom environment where everyone can thrive. Education is a two-way street, and together, we can make it an incredible adventure of growth and discovery.



Editorial Note

Dear Readers,

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the role of teachers/educators extends far beyond the conventional boundaries of imparting knowledge. Teachers are not just transmitters of information but shapers of young minds, influencers of character, and architects of inclusive and empathetic learning environments.

The "UnLearn Series" by Mantra4Change is a heartfelt tribute to educators who have dared to challenge lousy practices to ensure enriching learning experiences for their students. Each of these ten stories featured in this series is a testament to the power of reflection, resilience, and adaptation in the field of education. These stories reveal the transformative journey of educators who confronted their biases, questioned societal norms, and broke free from the shackles of tradition.

From unlearning the belief in inherent teaching abilities to dismantling the notion of a "teacher's pet," these educators have displayed remarkable courage in challenging the status quo. They have discovered that education is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour, and every student deserves the chance to shine uniquely.

As we celebrate these stories of unlearning, we invite educators, parents, mentors, and all stakeholders in education to join this transformative journey. Let us embrace the spirit of unlearning and continuously strive to reimagine how learning can take shape for tomorrow's leaders. We would love to have your story in our next edition!

We hope you had a great reading experience going through our second edition of "The Unlearn Series - Extraordinary Stories of Unlearning."

The Editorial Team
Mantra4Change





The
Un/Learn
Series

10
Mantra
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