



# Voices in School Education

*Insights and Perspectives from Educators and Experts Worldwide*



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Educators and Experts Worldwide*

***By Schoolreformer.com***

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## **Voices in School Education**

Schoolreformer.com  
C-2/286, 2 C Cross, Domlur II Stage  
Bangalore 560071, Karnataka  
www.schoolreformer.com  
support@schoolreformer.com  
+91 9620320320

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www.schoolreformer.com  
support@schoolreformer.com  
+91 9620320320

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## *Preface*

### *Voices in School Education: Insights and Perspectives from Educators and Experts Worldwide*

Education is the bedrock of any progressive society, and the teachers who shape the minds of future generations are integral to this foundation. Yet, in the larger narrative of Indian education, the voices of teachers themselves are often muted. Their experiences, insights, and reflections are seldom given the spotlight they deserve. *Voices in School Education* seeks to change that.

This book is the result of over two years of conversations with nearly 100 educators, school leaders, counsellors, education consultants, HR professionals, and child development experts from India and beyond. These discussions, conducted through the SchoolReformer.com platform, provide a rare and candid glimpse into the thoughts, challenges, and aspirations of educators. Here, teachers share their perspectives on the evolving role of education in India, the unique challenges they face in their classrooms, and their hopes for the future of learning.

In an educational landscape dominated by exam-focused policies and top-down governance, the contributions of teachers are often undervalued. Many schools operate under rigid systems that leave little room for creativity or critical thinking, and teachers are tasked with ensuring students succeed within these confines. Yet, beyond the exam results, there is a world of passion, dedication, and innovation happening in classrooms every day. This book captures that spirit.

*Voices in School Education* offers insights that will be invaluable for school leaders, policymakers, and educators alike. It is a resource for headmasters looking to incorporate fresh ideas into their schools, for educational institutions seeking inspiration, and for government bodies aiming to understand the on-the-ground reality of teaching in India.

But this collection is not just about the challenges. It is also a celebration of the resilience and creativity that educators bring to their work. Through these interviews, readers will meet educators who have embraced new technologies, fostered inclusive learning environments, and nurtured critical thinking in their students. These teachers are not just imparting knowledge—they are inspiring the next generation to think deeply and act responsibly.

The collection compiled here aims to foster dialogue within the educational community, inspiring teachers, both current and future, to reflect on their own practices and consider new approaches. It is my hope that this book will act as a catalyst for change, sparking a deeper conversation about the future of education in India.

If you are inspired by the insights and stories in this collection, I encourage you to engage with SchoolReformer.com, where these conversations continue to take place. Together, we can ensure that the voices of India's teachers are heard, appreciated, and acted upon.

Kartik Isvarmurti  
Managing Editor, Vadamalai Media Group  
SchoolReformer.com  
Bangalore, India

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# Adnan Lokhandwala

## Foundations of Trust: Key Leadership Qualities for Success



Adnan Lokhandwala is an experienced math professor with 21 years of teaching experience. He holds a Master's degree in Education from Mumbai University. Currently affiliated with Oberoi International School, Adnan's expertise lies in Mathematics education. He has contributed to the field through an interview in the April 2019 issue of the school magazine. Adnan has received honours for his academic achievements, including a First Class in his M.A. Education program.

### Contact Information:

Phone: +919969318878

Email : [adnansl\\_007@yahoo.co.in](mailto:adnansl_007@yahoo.co.in)

**W**hat are the essential leadership qualities that foster trust within an organization or educational institution, and how do these qualities contribute to achieving success and fostering a positive culture?

When I was working under a leader, I was expecting him/her to possess a few qualities of a leader, and it was disappointing for me that I could not find them in him/her. When I became a leader for a brief time, I ensured that I showed these qualities, and I got accolades for that as well. If a leader is not doing something, the juniors will be disappointed from the perspective of the juniors, if they do not find what they look for in a leader than the top management-looking in them. I have always felt that a Head of the Department or a coordinator tries to appease the management and not so much their junior, thereby overlooking the important fact that if the juniors are not happy with the leader, then the management, eventually, is not going to be happy about the leader.

There are a few qualities that a leader should imbibe in their working and day-to-day activities to win everybody over.

**1. Mutual respect:** I have seen many people, who after getting promoted as a leader,

change their attitude and start demanding respect. They are not friendly any more. This attitude will make them lose their respect which will create an unhealthy working atmosphere. The mutual respectful atmosphere is needed for the work to progress.

**2. No insecurities:** I have witnessed leaders often have insecurities of their own. They think that unless something is done, they may lose the confidence of the management, and so push the juniors, pressurise them, and they do not give enough accolades to the juniors or guide them to grow because of this insecurity. They are scared that the management will think the juniors are more capable than them. The leaders then lose the respect, and the juniors do not want to work under them. The leaders should understand the excellent work of the juniors will bring laurels to them to as they have guided the juniors to do the job. The leaders have to be careful not to let insecurities come in the way.

**3. Ready to go the extra mile:** The leaders who are willing to work extra and go beyond are always respected. Apart from delegating work to their juniors, they also should go the extra mile. Juniors always respect the leaders who lead the work and show them how to do well by correcting the mistakes that the leaders have done. The leaders should be able to step in when the juniors are unable to perform and ensure that the work moves on.

**4. Non-judgemental:** For any junior, the leaders being judgemental is a worry. He thinks that the leaders will think badly about him if he does a mistake. He will hesitate to ask for any help or clarification. This will affect the end-product. The leaders should put the mind game away and give a clear picture to the juniors that they will think only good of the juniors, will point out if there are any mistakes, but will not be judgemental on them. When the juniors get this assurance, they work with a better mindset and happy environment, and their job is obviously better. The juniors should be encouraged to express their views, and if they are acceptable, the leaders should implement them. Whatever be the end result, the leaders should not be judgemental. They should encourage them and point out the errors in a cordial manner.

**5. Approachable:** When the juniors start the work, they come with an expectation that they can approach the leaders for any doubt or help. But if the leaders are trying to maintain some distance since they feel insecure, the junior is always scared of the leaders, scared of asking questions, does not know how to go about the work, and the work is not done properly. The leaders may feel that the junior, if entertained, will keep coming back to them with doubts and increase their work load, but they are not helping the junior in any way. In case of any problem, if the leaders come down heavily on the junior, the junior is in great dilemma. So the leaders have to be approachable at all times to win the confidence and respect of juniors. They will know what is happening around them only then. The members of their team may seek help from other department members which does not speak well about the leaders. There will be lot of negative vibe in the department which will not allow the department to function well.

**6. Less demanding:** There are times when the leaders have to push the juniors to do better, but it should not be demanding. If they do it, then they are pressurising the juniors, and the job may not be done well. The juniors may lose faith in the leaders that they do not do the job but are forcing them to do it for which they have no right, make

them do the job, show it to the management and get accolades. The less the demand, the less the pressure situation.

**7. Pass on the accolades but take the blame:** A classic example is how Mr. Sateesh Dhawan, the head of Space Research Organisation took the blame for the debacle in putting the satellite into orbit the first time, but in the press conference, he appreciated the team members for the wonderful job they did and took the blame on himself for the error. They worked together again for a couple of years and made the mission successful. At that time also, he heaped praises on the team members. One can imagine the kind of respect he would have earned from the organisation. It will be a pleasure to work in such an atmosphere as you know you will be praised for the excellent job you do. The leaders should certainly practice this.

### **Do you view risk as an opportunity?**

Yes. Mr. Jeff Bezos took the notable risk when he started an online business. 20 years back, people were not ready to spend the hard earned money and considered it a fraud. But he thought it would be a success, and it did. Only risks can take you places. A few years back when WhatsApp was acquired by Facebook for a whopping nineteen billion dollars, there was an article in a magazine where somebody asked why Indian products are not sold for huge prices. The response was that Indians are trying to be safe, with a safe job, good salary to run the house, and are never ready to take the risk. That is our mentality. Indians lose a lot of good opportunities to do something great, to produce something remarkable because of this attitude. If your junior suggests that a proposition is risky, you can still go ahead, take risk, and let him take the chance. There may be some loss, but the end would be good. We should always use risky opportunity to go forward.

### **Is being selfless a plus point or minus point?**

It is a plus point. We have to realise that leaders are always being watched by the top brass as they have an eye for it. When they see that they are selfless, they will respect and reward them with whatever they can at the right moment. So being selfless is not a loss. The higher ups will be watching, appreciating, and rewarding the leaders at the appropriate time. They can also gain the respect of their juniors.

### **How should a leader empower others?**

I can quote the example of Mr. M.S. Dhoni. When he won the World Cup, he handed it over to the juniors to hold high, and he stood in a corner. It goes to show that it was also the team members who did it and not only the captain. So a leader should pass on the accolade to the team members, let them feel motivated, empowered, and they make use of it to grow in the organisation because the leader has given them the power. Every act like that will be rewarded suitably and will come back to you. You should never think that you did something, but somebody got the accolade. Eventually everyone knows that they did the job under your leadership, and you will be also rewarded. The leaders should look forward to empowering the juniors, and it will come back to them at some point of time.



# Aishwarya Shetty

## Fostering Innovation and Leadership in Education



Ms. Aishwarya Shetty is an Education Specialist in Education Above All, Doha Qatar. She works on designing products and experiences to make quality education accessible to every child. She talks extensively on education equity, simplified. The talk is an approved and abridged version of Janhvi Kanoria's (Director, EAA) TEDx Talk, 'A is for Arrow'.

### Contact Information:

Phone: +1 484 719 9382

Email: aishwaryahk@gmail.com.

## **H**ow can educators and educational leaders cultivate a culture of innovation and empower future leaders in the field of education?

There are about 263 million students who are out of school and have no access to education even in the simplest form. The number is increasing every year. A large portion of those in school also does not know how to read or do basic addition, which many feel is a problem that is impossible to solve. If we continue to use the traditional and conventional approach to schooling, these children will continue to be the hardest to reach. Due to covid, the conventional education system came to a halt, and with students out of school, education had to evolve instantly and get creative with different models of online learning.

When we think of online learning, things like computer, internet, and remote teacher facilitation, emails, Google classrooms come to our mind. If there were none of these facilities, especially for children with illiterate or semi-literate parents who have to focus on earning a daily living and cannot help the children in learning, the number of children that are unreached is significant. This is when Education Above All's innovation – The Internet Free Education Resource Bank (IFERB) came to being.

Based in Qatar, Education Above All focuses on helping the world's most marginalised communities and learners access quality education. As the Innovations Team, we identify unsolved challenges in the education landscape and design solutions to address them. IFERB is a collection of screen-free, engaging and student-led, project-based

learning modules that ensures learning continuity in under-resourced contexts. It was piloted in 11+ countries including Sudan, Yemen, India, Pakistan, Morocco and more, and has reached half a million children, including those in slums, remote rural and tribal areas, and refugee communities. We work in places where there are no schools, no textbooks, no educated teachers, and places where a basic phone is shared by the entire community. IFERB is an award-winning resource bank with multiple resources that promote holistic and experiential learning inspired from the child's own surroundings. The project and game-based modules span over a week with different subjects and disciplines. All our resources are cost free and available in multiple languages. Our key learning from implementing IFERB around the world is that global education needs 5 fundamental shifts.

### **1.We need to move from teacher-led classrooms to community-based education.**

We rightfully eulogize our formal education teachers so much that we often forget our first teachers - our family. In homes with low literacy rates, families are often completely excluded from the learning journey, resulting in a growing chasm of learning proficiency. However, since these children had minimal access to resources and teachers, we decided to capitalize on the powerful life lessons and innate knowledge of communities. In Kenya, grandmothers told their grandchildren traditional folk stories to practise literacy skills in the absence of any books- learners listened, re-imagined and re-invented these stories to author beautiful storybooks that captured their culture and heritage. A lot of these books have found a home in a small community library that the children built themselves – imagine this library in a place that never previously had a book. These interactions not only helped learners acquire practical knowledge, but also deepened familial bonds.

### **2.We have to move from learning only in classrooms to learning from the streets.**

Learning has become like a job – from 7 am to 2 pm, confined to the 4 walls of the classroom. But with closed school buildings, we helped free learning happen anywhere and all the time. For example, learners set up their own stores on the side of the roads in India to attract more customers – they made posters to advertise their products as they sold everything including agricultural products that they grew. While making invoices, they practiced numeracy, but their real learning was the much tougher art of negotiation. Just imagine how much learning happens when the mud streets of Zambia become number lines and students jumped and played to learn math!

### **3.We need to shift from globally standardized to locally relevant and contextual learning.**

Educators designing curriculum in Ministries in cities far away are often unable to imagine the lives of many of these children. For us, some tough lessons were learning that some students had never seen a newspaper, they didn't know what an animated comic character is. In an eye-opening example – learners in a remote and tribal district in Sudan told us that they had never seen an apple to associate it with the letter 'A' – their staple food came from local forest produce. So, we had these tribal children design their own alphabet book – where 'A' is more accurately represented by an 'axe' or an 'arrow'. In flood-prone Bihar, students learned about density by making their own



personal floatation devices or lifejackets using scrap plastic bottles. A simple project about making one's own ID cards can be customized so much depending on where it is used - for the 9-year-old Afghani boy, Aarif, it was a way to hold on to his identity and past and learn about the new people around him in a refugee camp in the US. In rural Maharashtra, it was the first time someone had ever asked 14-year-old Laxmi about her – and it helped her create a personal identity separate from the collective village identity.

#### **4. Let's stop asking students to stay silent and raise their hands, and instead ask them to use their hands.**

For almost every single intervention, it took us almost 4 weeks to convince learners that there was no example to copy and no set format or formula for their final product. We have conditioned our children to regurgitate and if they do think, it is in a well-defined box. But once unbridled, it's really like magic and children are unstoppable! In a project about COVID19 in the early days, that too in times of limited awareness and misinformation, students from Kashmir to Kenya, practiced simple sanitation and handwashing techniques, experimented with germ spread, and designed not just their own house rules but their own village rules for social distancing. They then proceeded to create their own masks and contactless sanitizers!

#### **5. We need to move to from textbook-based prescribed facts to discovery and inquiry-based learning.**

We often didn't have teachers or textbooks to share a "right answer" – so we let learners construct their own hypothesis, run experiments, analyse information, and come to their own conclusions. One startling learning was from a 'Population Census' project in Lebanon. Learners developed surveys to collect information from their family members to run a series of statistical and graphical experiments that lead to learners deducing that the "unemployed" women worked much harder and were more ambitious than "formally employed" men. These lessons can only be learned when experienced.

So, if I can leave you with one thought today it is the sense of possibility – where there is a genuine desire, there will be a means to move forward. The reality is that COVID has exposed the deep-rooted inequity in education and has been a huge setback, but it has also unshackled us from the constraints of curriculum, classrooms and assessments. Where there was no technology and schools, we reached learners in makeshift outdoor learning spaces, using group phone calls, loudspeakers in the community, and even instructions written on village walls – and we had over an 80% completion rate of the program. Where there were no materials, students made their own scientific tools, rulers, dice and books. If there were no teachers, we relied on older siblings, community members, family members and the child's own powers of deduction and experimentation to keep learning. And doing so we made miraculous leaps in learning of over 20% in just 3 months.

#### **What motivated you to join Education Above All foundation?**

I used to work in the slums during my college days and witnessed first-hand how education was the most powerful equalizer in circumstances of inequity. I understood that quality education was the long-term solution to any problem we see around the world today. This was further validated through my experiences as a Teach For India

Fellow and as a Senior Curriculum Manager in LEAD School. I joined Education Above All foundation to understand education across the global landscape and innovate sustainable learning solutions for the most marginalized children. It fuels my vision of every child, everywhere attaining an excellent education.

### **How do you reach out to the children who need resources?**

We reach out to them with the help of local NGOs who are empowered to work in their communities with financial support and training tools from EAA. We introduce project-based learning and build capacity at multiple levels – students, teachers, and parents. We will be releasing a complete toolkit for anyone who wants to implement IFERB independently. All our resources are available in multiple languages, are cost free and can be downloaded from our microsite – [www.resources.educationaboveall.org](http://www.resources.educationaboveall.org).

### **What difficulties you face when implementing this initiative?**

One challenge is that parents and teachers take time to realise that learning can happen in different ways. The mindset shift from the traditional textbook-based learning formats to project-based learning is difficult. Most would think children are only having fun and not ‘learning’ anything in the absence of books. But aren’t children supposed to have fun and enjoy the learning process? Parents and teachers, after 2 to 3 weeks of implementing IFERB, learnt that project-based learning did work, that children were learning curricular concepts rigorously - the baseline and end line data validated that. Moreover, teachers often think that when they do basic activities, it is ‘project-based learning’. A ‘project’ could be a series of fun activities, but ‘Project-Based Learning’ makes the child discover and understand the concept and develop their own hypothesis around it.

### **Where do you get funding from?**

Education Above All (EAA) is a foundation founded in 2012 by Her Highness Sheikh Moza Bin Nasser. EAA acts as an umbrella organisation for several programmes, each tackling specific challenges, objectives, and solutions under EAA’s core mandate, as well as under the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To date, 59 countries, more than 49 implementing partners, and over 100 projects have joined our mission to transform the lives of over 16 million children and youth through education. We are funded by organisations in Qatar and a global community of partners who support NGOs across the world and ensure education reaches the hardest-to-reach.



# Anita Mishra

## Equipping Students with 21st Century Skills for a Future-Ready Generation



Ms. Anita Mishra is the Dean Academics and HOD Biology and Biotechnology at Birla Balika Vidyapeeth, Pilani. With teaching experience of 28 years in various CBSE and ICSE schools, she is passionate about practising innovative pedagogies in teaching learning, and she talks about Learning skills, Literacy skills and Life Skills needed for a student to be future ready.

### Contact Information:

Phone: +918740085493

Email: dean@bbvpilani.edu.in

**A**s an ardent educator, I would like to share my thoughts and views on imparting 21st century skills to the students and making them future ready. I want to enumerate how Sherlock Holmes was not good or had limited knowledge in various subjects, but he had the astute observation skills, critical skills, and analytical skills needed for his profession. These skills are needed very much for the 21st century learners also if they have to shine in their future endeavours. They have to be sharp in acquiring these skills.

National Education Policy aims positively at reforming the entire educational system in India. It plans to take out the rote learning method from the students and wants them to gain knowledge from experiential learning. There should be no elaborate teaching from the stage by the teachers, rather the learners should go for learning everything by experiencing things by themselves. The focus has to shift from rote learning to doing and learning. The students have to become innovative. That is what has happened in this pandemic condition. Not only the students, but teachers also adapted so well to the situation. They were smart to pick up things brightly during the current pandemic situation when the whole world was suffering and did not feel they were victims of any cybercrimes.

The revised National Educational Policy wants to reduce the content. There would be key concepts that would be taught by the teachers. The idea of the curriculum will be given to the students, and they have to apply the same in their daily life to solve the problem. Emphasis will be more on their critical thinking with holistic approach of

education. It is going to be inquiry, discovery, discussion, and analysis-based learning that will take the fore seat. The 21st century skills that prepare the students for the opportunities and challenges are divided into three categories. The first one is the learning skills that enable the students to acquire knowledge from various sources which are of 4Cs. The next one is the literacy skills that help them to create and gain knowledge through media and information technology. The third one is the life skills which enable the learners to live their day -to-day life. When they learn these, they will be comfortable in life.

Among the 4 learning skills, critical thinking is very important for the students, and they should be taught to go for the critical thinking. There should be no rote method, and students have to come up with solutions. They have to create knowledge through various resources. They should get the responsibility of learning with the help of teachers and come up with solutions. Collaboration is important in learning skills for the educators to impart in this era. The communication skills of the students should also be improved as they need to know how to communicate effectively with others.

IMT or Information Media Technology makes the students improve their literacy skills through information from newspapers, books, internet, radio, television, and many more. This is considered yet another type of 21st century skills. The students should learn the life skills to lead their life in the current era which is changing drastically. They should be flexible and adaptable, and to cultivate this quality, the educators have a major role to play. The learners should be flexible enough to adapt to the changing things and be smart enough to accept them. Else they will be eliminated from the system. Learners should be taught to be leaders, and we have to prepare them to lead the world. The educators should help the students take the initiatives, failing which the world will not change. They will be at a loss. They should be productive and achieve sustainable development. Of late we find learners lacking social skills. They do not come out to play and have to be pushed out to mingle with their friends. Educators have the duty of making them come together physically and interact. This skill needs to be imparted to the learners as part of the 21st century development.

The learning skills comprise of 4Cs and this is how the educator can impart these skills.

**1. Critical thinking:** This skill can be imparted to the learners by organising panel discussion. The students can be given a topic and asked to go for group discussion, pose questions, asked to speak on the given topic, get case studies and analyse, and come up with solutions. They can be given research-based investigatory projects, on which they have to do survey, get data analysis, and come up with solutions. They can also be part of crosswords, sudoku, puzzles, and riddles. According to Christopher Hitchens, “Essence of independent mind lies in what it thinks and not in how it thinks.”

**2. Creativity:** A certain situation has to be given to the students. They should go for situational drawing and show with their creativity how they would behave under various circumstances. They can be asked to draw images and discuss with others about the various topics, which is a beautiful exercise. They become creative and learn a lot. Graphic and infographic designing, sculpture, pottery, craft, and photography can be encouraged to exhibit their creativity, rather it can also be taken as a vocation. I like the term SCAMPER from CBSE handbook, which is Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify,

Put, Eliminate, and Reverse. The child should be allowed to create alternative things and imagine the scenario if roles are reversed. They should be exposed to different 3D images under project based learning and virtual learning. They should be creative, and teachers have a role to make them do so. Albert Einstein says, “Creativity is contagious, pass it on.” The teacher should be creative and make the learners also creative.

**3. Collaboration skills:** This helps in team building. Students should go for art integrated hands-on projects. The teacher can give a task which can be done by groups of students to be accomplished in parts, and you will be surprised to see the entire task getting done so well. Treasure hunt activity can help the students to build team and collaborate with them. They can be encouraged to play dumb charades as that helps them to become smart enough to understand what the other member says by action. They learn many things from search to win game when the teacher gives problems to them to come up with solutions. If they are unable to do so, the teachers can give clues. Steve Jobs puts it, “Great things in business are not done by one person. They are done by a team of people.” If we want the country to be great, we should work in team.

**4. Communication skills:** Teachers can encourage the learners to do dramatics, mimicry, role play and caricatures. We can even ask them to take class for a day. The students will learn to communicate the topic. They can be part of panel discussion and group discussions. Teachers can encourage them to learn the communication skills through activities like a Radio Jockey, by speaking on a given topic within a limited time. The learners can also have pairs and make pair talk on the topic within a given time. It improves their communication skills. As per Ralph Emerson, “All great speakers were bad at first.” It is only through the support and exercise the skill can be built.

Apart from the above, the students should gain literacy or information skills. They have to gather information from digital and other sources, authenticate the facts gathered by them for credibility and accuracy, and learn to use the information to persuade, explain, and create the knowledge on their own by their research work using resources.

Media literacy is also needed for the 21st century learner. Students should learn about different means of mass communication. Once they have got the information, they should go for checking the facts. Teachers should promote awareness of the influence of media on students and how the information from the media can be used more adequately.

Technology literacy should be used to get students trained in using the on-line resources judiciously. The teachers should teach them to create and share the resources and collaborate the same. They should be taught to use the technology with adequate knowledge, be aware of cyber safety, and cyber laws, apart from copyright issues. They have to collaborate and share the resources. There should be awareness of the cyber laws and cybercrimes.

In the words of Abraham Lincoln, “Do not believe everything on internet just because there is a picture next to it.” So the learner should understand that all information on the internet is not authentic and reliable to use. They should be capable of judging which knowledge is authentic, which can be helped by the teachers.

I want to emphasise on the 21st century life skills - the most important ones.

**Flexibility:** The learner should be given a part of the knowledge in the classroom, and they should do the other part at home. Flipped classroom approach can be followed. Teachers should be adaptable to the resources available, use general articles for resources, and also create resources that the children will learn from. There are many beautiful innovative things that can be developed such as designing new games on internet, role change in group activities etc. They should become flexible and adapt to the roles.

**Leadership:** The learners are the future leaders of the world. Students should be made leaders. They can participate in round table conferences on various topics like solving pandemic problem or climate change, create a model united nations where they can debate, and these will enhance their public speaking. They can lead quiz programs. Teachers can make them participate in soap box activity to speak on a particular topic and thus groom them as leaders. The students also can participate in team paper presentation, skit, role play etc.

**Initiative:** They should come forward for the role play, to take part in class magazine, and every child has to contribute to newsletter. This will help the learners to become proactive. They will take initiative in the class, and they can even be given a chance and allowed to conduct assembly.

**Productivity:** Productivity helps the learners and the school to grow in the right direction. They should exhibit their productivity by taking part in school fairs, expos, research projects, and celebrating readers' week with the wall magazine designed, based on the book read by so and so. They will be monitored and guided by the teachers.

**Social skills:** It is the teachers' responsibility to make them come together. Cultural relay is to let the team of children be active, such as acting as each state and explaining about it on their own. In a circle time, they can come together and tell the audience about the positive points of others. Everyone feels elated when their positive points are disclosed by others. By playing copy cat, the teachers can train them to copy each other as day-to-day exercise which will help them get used to bullying, and they will never feel for the same again.



# Anjali Yadav

## Unlocking Potential: The Impact of Student-Led Conferences



Ms. Anjali Yadav, with a Bachelor's in Elementary Education from Gargi College, Delhi University, and a Master's in Sociology, currently is serving as the National Head of Learning and Development at GEMS Education, India. She is an innovative and experienced teacher with a demonstrated history of working in the education management industry. She explains about the pathway to lead students led conferences and the advantages.

### Contact Information:

Phone: +919810588059

Email: [anjali.yadav@gemsedu.in](mailto:anjali.yadav@gemsedu.in)

## **W**hat are student-led conferences, and how do they work at school level?

SLCs are pathway to students' sharing their progress in a closed discussion with Parents and Teachers, showcasing their portfolio. It's a time for reflection, celebration, and working on set goals.

Prior to the Pandemic, students were engaged in creating physical portfolio collating their work, and afterwards we adapted to the new normal in the era of Technology and from physical moved to digital portfolio. It is a presentation using any tools like Canva, Sway or Power Point, whichever the student is comfortable with. We meet at a time when the portfolio is organised, when the parents or family members join the conference, and the child leads the discussion. The teacher's role is just to be a facilitator, and the student has the responsibility to lead the conference. The parents are active listeners. The presence of parents is a wonderful opportunity for the parents to observe school from the child's view, how the teachers shape their learning, and help them move towards progression.

It is not just the academic aspect that the child will share. We start this from Grade 1 and make the child take the ownership of learning while sharing the portfolio. The meeting has to be done in a place, not necessarily in the classroom, where it is noise-free for the child to focus on. This could be a new concept introduced in the school, and when the child does it for the first time, he may need the help of parents and teachers to create the portfolio and prepare himself to conduct the presentation or



any spontaneous reflective questions. We, at GEMS, believe in intrinsically motivating learners to take responsibility to progress and measure growth. The flexibility is with the child to select the best of their work, engagements during classes, achievements, and best opportunities for the portfolio. Designing Portfolio is a continuous process, hence, to present the Portfolio, the child has to work diligently and put in his best efforts. The students are equally excited and motivated to do their best for this activity as parents are involved in the process. They enjoy welcoming their parents into their school life and take charge of the conference.

The children can prepare the portfolio according to their choice, integrating their introduction, set goals after reflecting on their performance, different subject works, achievement, and all they would like to share in co-curricular. The efforts to make their portfolio unique is utmost priority of students. The portfolio reflects back their best work, which is extremely beautiful to observe as a teacher and parent. The teachers do provide with customized reflection sheet according to different age groups with questions, for instance what did you learn, how it is related to the topics, what they found interesting, which part was challenging to do, how they could improve upon it, why are they considering it as best work, etc. It ignites thinking among students at young age which helps in improvement in various areas.

At GEM we practise 2 cycles of SLCs, one in July and another in December. So the child has exposure and timeline to be reflective of the work to be done within the cycle and depict the growth. Moving from first portfolio to the next one progression is tracked and visible to the stakeholders, and it becomes a concrete evidence of an experience of whole academic year.

The education pattern has changed, so also the teaching and learning process. Classrooms are different wherein students are active participants, they have voice and choice, and confidence to question and discuss. While engaged in SLC, they learn new skills through the process. They can justify their reflections/perspectives/opinions when questioned by teachers and parents. The event gives the children a responsibility to shine using their skills. In a Parent Teachers Meeting, the teachers express the progress and areas of improvement about the students, and parents share their feedback as well, but the child misses the opportunity to talk. In SLC the child becomes the centre, and parents and teachers become part of that as well.

The responsibility of the teachers is to motivate the students to build a portfolio. They can set expectations, and students will outperform it. The SCLs have to be marked in the calendar, informed to the parents in advance, and progression is done with time. For the first timers, it is important to schedule well in-advance, and rehearse on the demonstration for the presentation of Portfolio.

Setting SMART Goals is one of the most important component of SLC. It has to be specific, measurable, achievable/attainable, relevant and time bound. It need not be academic, it can be behavioural, team building, collaboration of skills etc. Objective is to reflect on your own and set a goal understanding the scope of improvement in different areas.

The parents are an essential part of the students' learning, hence through SLC, they get



to see what excites their child, what they like/dislike, need to improve and show the maximum improvement, etc. The Portfolio is an evidence of their learning from young age which progresses each academic year. Parents have to be considerate and patient to listen and ask probing questions to their children to help during the conference.

The portfolios can include assessment sheets, formal and informal assessments, reflection sheets, goal sheets etc. While in Online/Hybrid mode, the children made digital portfolio using SWAY a presentation tool by Microsoft.

For Instance, as a subject area in English, they can put their writing, poems, or any group activity they have done, in music the song they've learned, and in science the experiments they have conducted. During the documentation, students learn skills such as organization, decision-making, reflective thinking.

On the day of SLC, it's a celebration of learning in presence of all the stakeholders of learning. The SLC ends with a motivation pat for the child and way forward towards the articulated set goals. It's a well-known concept and practice all across the world and many schools in India have adopted as well. The advantages outshine each year, hence I would like to extend my support in helping understand the process and train teachers and schools to work best for our present generation.

### **What made you choose this topic?**

I am in a role of professional development trainer for teachers, hence it is my responsibility to find best ways to empower teachers to deliver the best to our 21st century students. I have felt the impact of SLCs in my school and the shift in mind-set of parents, teachers, and students.

### **How do you encourage less motivated children to participate in such activities?**

We have mixed grouping in our classrooms. If students are less motivated, it could be due to multiple reasons, one of them being their no interest in the subject,. hence, bigger responsibility on teachers to create an interest in the subject with different strategies and adapting student learning styles. Asking questions, motivating through kind words, caring towards their progress, appreciating, and building confidence can work wonders.

### **What should be the goal of a good teacher?**

The primary goal of the teachers should be to create a safe space for students where they are allowed to make mistakes, have freedom to speak, work on their creativity, and have a good relationship with the teachers. No student learns from a teacher they don't like or fearful of. Learning is ignited when teachers create meaningful relationships with the students and show care to help them and facilitate them to get the best out of them despite their individual natures. Bringing real life context to the contextual knowledge is one of the strategies to engage students.



# Anshita Gupta

## Transforming Early Childhood Education: Anshita Gupta's Vision and Impact



Contact Information:

Phone: +919928344666

Email: ansh.agarwal4093@gmail.com

Anshita Gupta, a dynamic educator in Sun India Pre School, is currently pursuing Ph.D. in the Management of Early Childhood Education. Holding an MBA degree in Project Management, Anshita focuses on modern educational approaches to cultivate future global leaders for the betterment of the nation. She also holds diplomas in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Child Psychology from West Yorkshire, UK, further enhancing her qualifications. She talks about Gratitude and its Importance in Education in an interview.

**What strategies and innovations are driving the transformation of early childhood education, and how are they impacting the development and readiness of young children for future learning?**

'Thank You' - the most magical word in the world. We come across various terms in various languages to mean gratitude. It is a warm feeling of thankfulness which comes from inside us to show our appreciation for things that we have. It shows us how we are making constant effort to count our blessings. Most of us have our homes, food, and clothes to wear which are important, and by saying Thank You, we attract more abundance in our lives.

Gratitude changes the way we look at things and opens new horizons for us. We can overcome even the biggest hurdles in our lives by being grateful. We can enjoy what we have and become more grounded in the event of failures and successes. There are ups and downs in everybody's life. So, gratitude helps us to become more balanced in life.

As adults it is important to tutor our kids about gratitude. As we are building our future generation, it becomes crucial that we develop the kids with not just higher IQs

but with even higher EQs. Many CEOs in the world have both higher IQ and stronger EQ. It helps us to become more informed and make better decisions in life. Practising gratitude helps to analyse our journey as to who we are, how we go here, and where we want to go.

It is not just enough for adults to practice gratitude but tutoring kids about gratitude is equally important. It helps them to form better habits which results in a better mindset and better way of living. It makes them emotionally strong, which is vital in today's world.

Practicing gratitude helps kids to develop good habits from the start and makes them emotionally stable people, peaceful, calm, and capable of regulating their emotions, thereby focusing on good things in life. They learn since they have so much, they should be thankful to parents and God for that. They learn the value of everything. It brings more happiness to them. They learn to be eventually more resilient to face the ups and downs of life, find solutions, and bounce back from such tough situations. Feeling gratitude and thanking for the blessings helps them to sail through the challenges, keeping their emotions intact. At times things may not work the way we want, but we can still thank the Almighty for the technology and internet that helps connect to many people. These are trivial things that keep us going, otherwise these glitches will irritate us and make us angry.

There are many ways we can use to teach gratitude to children. It should be taught in a fun way. Children will not understand if we do that with more lectures and making it an obligation. So, we must become their role model by practising it ourselves. Kids learn by imitating us when we follow constantly and making it a ritual. In the family and schools, we should make it a ritual by asking kids what they want to thank. We can expect some very good answers from them. In the family, we can make it a practice to ask them what they want to thank before going to bed or before dinner. We can see that within 15 days, children will ask you even if you forget it. We can even make it a game by asking each family member what they want to thank. They can mention food, books, memory, or anything in nature. This will improve the positive vibrations in the house.

The teachers can also ask them to name the place, family member or friend that they want to thank. The environment in the classroom will change. We can also tell our kids to thank at least one person every day, which can be for any purpose – such as mother for cooking healthy food, father for playing with them, helper for helping them. Any habit will become a routine within 21 days, and we can notice the change in the period when life is happier, calmer, and composed. It is essential that we thank God for the life, for what we have, and the other blessings such as healthy food and clean water which are not available to many in the world. We often forget about the present which increases our happiness by saying thank you.

Let us raise happy and grateful children as gratitude is the right attitude. Gratitude multiplies our happiness, and we can see that we get more than we thought of. We can practise as much as we want as there is no limit to being grateful.

### **What does a gratitude coach actually aim to achieve?**

The main aim of a Gratitude coach is to teach how to practice gratitude, make people

understand the meaning of it, and make it a daily routine. She works on touching millions of lives and imparting happiness to them. She helps them to unlock their potential of which they are not aware. When they practise gratitude, they will realise their full potential and achieve more in life.

### **What is the right age to start teaching students topics like gratitude?**

The right age to start kids about gratitude is 2 years as I do it with toddlers in my workshop. Kids start to talk at that age, and till the age of five, the conscious mind is developing at a very rapid pace. When we include gratitude in their minds at that tender age, we can see wonderful results. The kids will start using the words Thank You often, and the habit improves their character and personality. So, it is advisable to start as early as possible. Even if the child has not spoken its first word, you can start teaching Thank You to him.

### **Can you throw some light on your school?**

Sun India Pre School was founded in 2017, and it is a creatively attractive preschool focusing on creating and not just on academic thinking. We teach a lot of values to the children and using that we teach them academics too. Basically, we work on three things – IQ, EQ, and SQ. We try to do a lot of activities to strengthen their IQ, EQ, and SQ.

### **What about the consultancy services you offer? To whom do you offer?**

Sun India Consultancy is a different venture which I have started. Since I have experience in the education management industry, I have started offering consultancy to various preschools and start-ups. For schools I offer diverse types of consultancies such as curriculum related, branded marketing strategy, and complete project management. I do a lot of research, and with this knowledge I try to make it a profitable venture for my clients.

### **Do you collaborate with other schools in India?**

Yes. I do work, and I am a consultant on the board of many schools and Ed tech start-ups.

### **What are the ways you associate yourself with other schools?**

I associate with the other schools by being on their panel, helping them develop diverse types of curricula, by giving teachers training, or if they need business related advice on strategies and expanding their business, I help them. I collaborate with them by being on their board.

### **What are the challenges of being an education consultant and entrepreneur?**

Life is full of challenges which make us view life in a unique perspective. During Covid, many schools struggled, but technology came to our rescue. It has become part of our lives in the last 2 years. We get diverse types of clients to manage. I feel by being grateful and thankful for everything, slowly and gradually things will fall in place.



# Anuja Panwar

## Fostering Teamwork to Create a Self-Directed Learning Environment



Mrs. Anuja Panwar, an esteemed Chemistry teacher with a rich educational background, holds an M. Sc. in Chemistry from University of Rajasthan and University Certificate in Computing, computer and Information Sciences and Support Services from The University of Huddersfield, UK. Currently serving her notice period at Pathways School, Gurgaon, she brings an impressive 25 years of experience in the field of education.

Contact Information:

Phone: +91-9971154494

Email: [panwar.anuja@gmail.com](mailto:panwar.anuja@gmail.com)

**H**ow can educators cultivate teamwork among students to foster a self-directed learning environment that promotes collaboration, problem-solving, and mutual support?

As an educator and a learner all through life, I believe that focusing on creating a self-directed learning environment requires teamwork. All the stakeholders play a key role in the self-directed learning environment. Furthermore, we all are all learners - students, teachers, mentors, and parents alike. Learning environments are initially created by parents. For instance, when a toddler tries to do something on their own – such as tying shoelaces, we should allow them to do it by themselves as long as they are not hurting themselves in the process. Let them make mistakes and let them learn from these mistakes, as it is the foundation of self-directed learning environment.

We should create a mindset where the learner grows to think freely, express freely, explore, try out new things and make mistakes. Additionally, the approach and attitude of each member of the team in giving feedback when someone makes a mistake, should be developed, rather than punishing/ reprimanding them for not achieving what they were expected to. We must make them realise their mistakes and help reflect, and that is how they learn from their errors.

To develop self-directed learners, as teachers we must work on students' skills and not only focus on the content that we teach. We should help young learners realise their limitations, strengths, and weaknesses and work on those by giving suggestions. We can guide them to harness their strengths and overcome the limitations. It happens

when students are working on a group project, a few will be working and others wasting their time. We have to guide them to realise what is expected from them. At home, as parents, when a student is assigned homework, he should assume the ownership of learning and finishing the work.

Removing the fear of failure, doubtfulness, disinterest, and dependency is very important. We can do this by giving positive feedback, encouraging them, motivating them, allowing them to make mistakes, by welcoming their ideas, allowing them to speak, and then correct them, if required.

In a self-directed learning environment, the students would be inquisitive learners, eager to research and explore and find out things by themselves. That should not be hindered but allowed in a healthy way by guiding them. They should identify what skills they have such as communication skills - oral, written or skills in social segments. They should work with the set of people so that they can improve on the topic or subject and be reflective at home also by discussing things and getting suggestions from others. This will make them responsible and dispense with fear of failure and dependency.

I, as a teacher, want the students to make mistakes, and learn for themselves before I offer any guidance. I create WhatsApp groups or some other social media groups of my students, and when a student poses a question on the group, there is a quick response from others. That is how they learn from each other. I ensure only study and work-related material is posted on the group.

Post covid pandemic situation, usage of social media has become inevitable. Learners feel comfortable when they get quick response to the queries and learn to improve their understanding of the topic. The teachers ask the question to understand the learning of the students. If there is any learning gap, the teachers can work on that to improve the learning. So, by using such efforts, we can create a beautiful self-directed learning environment in the class, home, outside, and social media.

### **What are the challenges students may face in a self-directed learning environment?**

The challenge is their willingness to do things on their own. Students need to accept the responsibility to learn, failing which they feel the challenge and pressure of self-directed learning environment. I have come across parents or mentors who sit with students to help them complete their academic assignments and tasks. Here, in doing so, as adults, we do not realize that we are hindering self-directed learning, and that young learners become dependent on others in this process. This kind of support should be avoided consciously. It can be achieved by building the confidence of and encouraging the learners to try first, and if they still are unable to do it on their own, then we can help them or guide them. When students start feeling that they can do things themselves, other skills such as social, communication or thinking and research skills develop, and of course these are important skills.

### **Can a self-directed learning environment improve quality of life too?**

Yes. When students learn in a self-directed learning environment, their dependency on others becomes less. Unless they try to do something new by themselves, the new learning does not happen. We are always all learning, and it makes us feel more liberated.

## **Is self-directed learning more about making children more curious to learn?**

Yes, as parents, when we go out with children, we must ask them to look out and notice things around them and discuss with them to develop their curiosity. Interaction with them is more important than letting them get involved in their gadget or phone. We must develop their curiosity at every point when we get the opportunity.

## **How do you measure self-directed learning?**

The measurement is the fulfilment the child/learner brings. It is not in terms of mark or grade, but it is about the confidence the learner develops. It is the moment when I see the glow and contentment on the child's face when he has achieved something all by himself. The child wants to share that he achieved something new in class, and we must ensure that it is encouraged so that the child becomes a self-directed learner.

## **Do you think that self-directed learning environment is not happening in school, and what do the managements do to bring about the kind of learning you want?**

In terms of Indian education, it depends on the teacher and not on the kind of curriculum alone. It is happening but not to the extent I would expect it to. The reason is the Indian mentality to help the child quickly to ease out his efforts. That is why we have not reached the stage we should have in self-directed learning. We do not pose questions after the class is over, we do not allow them to think about why things are happening in a particular way. We should prompt them to ask more questions to create a self-directed learning environment. I would like to see it more in the future.

## **If a young graduate wants to start teaching science in schools, what is your advice?**

It is a brilliant idea as they would know how to improve education further because they would have had good educators in their life. When a young student learns from passionate teachers, he will want to become an educator due to the inspiration from his own teachers and mentors.

## **In Cambridge or IB, self-directed learning environment is better compared to CBSE or State board schools. What are your views?**

It is more due to the approach of the teachers than the curriculum. IB has certain rules and guidance so that the teachers know how to impart knowledge through an inquiry-based learning approach. They allow the students to be more inquisitive, explore, research, and present their findings. In CBSE and ICSE, the teachers are focused on completing the syllabus, and so their approach is also directed towards it.

## **By just having pass or fail based on the marks, can we make children more curious and directed in classrooms?**

We do not need a pass or fail. I am against it. Fear of failure must be removed. The students are learners and keep learning. No one is going to fail - when this fear is removed, they learn more and become confident about themselves.

## **As an educator, are you optimistic about the state of science education in India?**

Yes, it is developing manifolds in India. Many see great scientific entrepreneurs from India, and it is certainly going to do well in the future as well.



# Voices in School Education:

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