MORE THAN A
TEACHER

Preface

More Than a Teacher is a tribute to the challenging and important role played by teachers in nation building. It explores the complexity that this role demands as it touches and moulds tender minds.

This book is also an attempt at throwing open some of the constraints teachers face and offering possible solutions to common problems. Books can't claim to address all the issues and offer solutions, but, can definitely reach new information on emerging issues and ideas on teaching and learning. This is exactly what *More Than a Teacher* attempts to do.

As teachers browse the book, they will get a sense of belonging in a fraternity working towards a common cause.

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Blended Learning
Achievement of Learning Outcomes

Teachers who have been in the profession for a decade or more, feel that new entrants to teaching are fortunate to be in these exciting times. New teachers are enjoying amazing possibilities what with new technologies and approaches opening up unheard of support for teaching and learning.

For a long time now, Macmillan has been enthusiastic about using technology in teaching, not only to support teachers, but also to help students learn independently, outside the classroom. When we conduct conferences, we often hear comments such as 'What is e-learning?' and 'How does digital content help me teach?' These questions have motivated us to research e-learning and come up with resources to help you integrate technology into your curriculum.

We at Macmillan have been working on 'Blended Learning' products to address the changing needs of educators and learners. Screening, interacting and updating are pre-requisites for any mode of learning today. Young learners want to access, share and flow information all the time. It is this learner who is impelling change in the classroom and in the learning-teaching environment.

We define blended learning as a course which combines a face-to-face (F2F) classroom component with an appropriate use of technology to allow e-learning. Any content that can be delivered via a variety of media, including the Internet, video tape, television, and CD/DVD is considered e-learning. Resources like e-books, interactive activities, animations and slide shows empower teachers to locate and create web lessons, quizzes, rubrics and classroom calendars to assist K-12 students with different learning styles. Today, many teachers are using digital technologies to engage students in more personalised learning experiences.

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Separate roles of the teacher and technology

It is important to consider the respective roles of the teacher and technology in the classroom. Although there may be areas of overlap, it is important not to see their roles as interchangeable and to clearly distinguish what each can do, that the other cannot. The teacher is there to do a number of things which require human interaction.

❑ Firstly, perform a needs analysis.
   The teacher tests the learners and also gets to know them in terms of personality and attitude.

❑ Secondly, teach in a principled way.
   Teachers always focus on the learners' needs and ask whether technology will improve teaching and enhance learning. It is important to ensure that teaching is driven by pedagogy and supported by technology.

❑ Thirdly, use technology to complement and enhance F2F teaching.
   Teachers ensure that technology complements a classroom activity. They must choose online material which has a close correlation with the content of the lesson so that it is accepted more enthusiastically by the students.

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'*It's not so much the program, more what you do with it.*' (Jones, 1986)
This famous observation was made a relatively long time ago in technological terms and it still holds true.

A Classroom
with a Difference

Classrooms are no longer the only place where education takes place. Education is no longer time-bound or restricted to the four walls. The need of students is changing very rapidly from a face-to-face interaction with teachers in the classroom to learning a subject never heard of before as a self-study module from a subject expert from a university thousands of miles away!

How do you prepare students for the type of jobs which do not yet exist? How do we make sure that students are ready to face the challenges of the 21st century? How do we make sure that knowledge is available to students 24x7 and they are connected to a knowledge hub which will guide them whenever they want and wherever they want?

My e-classroom was the outcome of all these questions which nagged me day in and day out as to how I can be more effective with this changing role of teacher-student in the teaching-learning environment. Journeys of a thousand miles start with a small step. I started searching for tools which could help me in my quest. After evaluating many tools available on the net, I zeroed in on Google Sites for three reasons—it is easy, simple and is a free tool from Google which can synchronize easily with other Google Apps for education like Google Drive, Picasa and YouTube.

To create a virtual classroom for my students, I started thinking from the viewpoint of students—the information they need, the instructions that can be given in the e-classroom and so on. Brick by brick, the e-classroom was built – updating it from time to time to suit the needs of the students. Students loved it. The e-classroom had everything they ever wanted to know—syllabus, past year board papers, lesson plans, digital lesson material, videos and pictures, subject calendar, career counselling guidelines, project and activity guidelines and updates, tests taken, homework and assignments, test and activity marks…. This has liberated students from the shackles of

dependency on the teacher. Students who were not able to attend the class because of their sports schedule or ill health could now keep themselves updated by logging on to the e-classroom. Now, no student can miss homework or tests. And if they do, the responsibility lies with them. It saved me a lot of time repeating the same information again and again to different groups of students. I started creating a separate Class Site for every year, which was archived in my e-classroom. It provided a powerful way of showcasing the work done by their seniors.

Taking it one step further, I encouraged each of my students to create their individual e-portfolio. Each of these e-portfolios was linked with my e-classroom. The transparency of each student's work has helped a lot in motivating students to achieve their best. Student e-portfolios are very helpful for Comprehensive and Continuous Formative Assessment. Now, I do not have to take care of thousands of project papers and assessments. It has also helped my school save lots of paper, hence saving money. Just share one link and parents can continuously observe their wards' progress throughout the year.

Teachers have to find ways to reach out to students and these 'Digital Natives' will really appreciate it if teachers can make best use of available resources. And believe me, it will even make a teacher's life simpler–using contact time with students more effectively.

Teaching Methodology

Virtual E-Classroom – *Masti Ki Pathshala*

An E-classroom is prepared using Google applications so that any student from around the world can access material, papers, assessment records, career counselling tips, homework, etc. 24x7. It has tremendously helped my students who are taking part in sports and other activities at national level. Now they do not miss out on what happens in class. It has also helped me in keeping parents updated with what is happening in the class and the performance of their ward. Usage of e-classroom also has the benefit of cutting the paper usage – that way I save cost for my school and paper to save the environment.

Sample:
● http://sites.google.com/site/bijaldamaniseclassroom/

Virtual E-Portfolios of Students

It's important that students learn the ICT skills. Not only that the assessment of the students should be 'Formative' instead of 'Summative'. All students of Grade 11 make their own e-portfolio of activities, case studies and project work done during the year. It helps them in collaborating and sharing their work with other fellow students around the world and helps in University admission.

Samples:
● http://sites.google.com/site/bijaldamaniseclassroom/Home/students-projects/projec
● https://sites.google.com/site/snkstd1112201011/home/std-11/students-e-portfolio-1(E-Portfolios of 2010 batch)

Innovative Product and Marketing Activity

In this activity, students teams are expected to come up with an innovative product (something which is not available in market).

Not only that, they have to prepare newspaper advertisement, magazine advertisement, radio jingle and television advertisement using various technology tools available to them. Students make a working model of their proposed product and using various software, they make their marketing package.

Students are also expected to create a total package of presentation using their own videos in Microsoft Powerpoint Producer.

On the day of presentation, they dress professionally, and present their product and their marketing plan in front of their class, other contestants and the panel of judges.

Samples:
- 2011 - http://www.wix.com/ipmcompetition201112/ipmcompetition2011
- 2010 - http://www.wix.com/ipmcompetition201112/ipmcompetition
- Blog - http://innovativeproductandmarketingcompetition2011.wordpress.com/
- YouTube - http://www.youtube.com/user/ipm201112

Using Facebook as a Platform for Discussion

I have been carrying out this Action Research to see the impact of using social networking sites like FaceBook for effective engagement of students, especially the one who are shy and passive in the traditional classroom set up. A group has been created and students discuss whatever has been taught in the class, the presentations, the news around the globe regarding the field of business etc. in the presence of their teacher. It has tremendously helped the shy students overcome their shyness and become confident participants in regular classroom set up.

The benefits of this activity

- ❑ Was able to engage shy and passive students in discussions
- ❑ Was able to guide the students about using the tool like Facebook appropriately (It was used for Cyber bullying earlier.)
- ❑ Could use the platform to include parents for their inputs in the discussions

Project based Learning

Galaxy Bazaar Projects – Social Entrepreneurship Project
Galaxy Bazaar is a unique initiative of Ms Bijal Damani. This project has the following objectives.

- ❑ To give the practical exposure of real world of business to students
- ❑ To involve the community in this project based learning

- To educate the under privileged students by donating the money raised by students from elite background – to bring about awareness and equity in students from different strata of society
- To inculcate financial literacy in the students and educate them about Corporate Social Responsibility
- To teach the lessons in ethical business to the entrepreneurs of tomorrow and tune them to become *Creative Capitalists*

In this Social Entrepreneurship Project, a bazaar is set up every year before Diwali. All the goods, ranging from diyas, colours and clothes to automobile parts and furniture, is sold at the bazaar. Students get in touch with the wholesalers of these products, and purchase the product at wholesale price on credit and put up for sale at, Bazaar at a price lesser than the retail price. The project runs purely on commercial principles where students take care of every single cost incurred for marketing, renting out the venue for bazaar, transportation, etc. Students also create an official website for the event and get in touch with various companies for sponsorship. For example, last year we had Honda and Chevrolet Motors sponsoring the event by showcasing their cars at the event. The other sponsors were local jewelers, banks, education institutions, construction companies, etc. After many days of preparation and at the end of three days event, net profits are calculated. These net profits are used to sponsor education of children who have dropped out of formal education system and are working as child labour in the nearby vicinity. The focus is to provide basic reading, writing and mathematical skills. (And now with HP Grant, basic technological skills that will help them go a long way. Example a child who can operate a computer a little bit, will find it easy to operate an ATM Machine.)

Sr. No.	Year	Name of the Event	No. of Students	Profits	Donated for
1	2005	Big Business Bang	30	8000	Old age home
2	2007	Galaxy Bazar	65	20000	NGO Pratham Reading program
3	2008	Galaxy Bazaar Reloaded	65	70000	Rotary – Educating under privileged student
4	2009	Galaxy Bazaar Reloaded	80	200000	
5	2010	Galaxy Bazaar Carnival	120	400000	Decision pending

Samples:

- https://sites.google.com/site/bijaldamaniseclassroom/Home/galaxy-bazaar-projects
- http://galaxybazar.co.cc/ (Galaxy Bazaar Carnival 2010 official site)
- https://sites.google.com/site/galaxybazaarunleashed/Galaxy Bazaar Unleashed 2009 Official site)
- https://sites.google.com/site/galaxybazaarreloaded/Home (Galaxy Bazaar Reloaded 2008 Official site)

Virtual Investment Portfolio

Students are given virtual ₹1,00,000 for six months and they have to make investment decisions of investing them into various areas like Gold, Equity shares, Bank FDs, Foreign Currencies, etc. keeping in mind the real market conditions. It helps them in understanding the Capital, Money market and dynamics of economies better. I also use Moneybhai, a virtual website for learning to invest, to teach the ups and downs of the stock market to students.

- Link: http://moneybhai.moneycontrol.com/

RPP (Research, Presentation, Public speaking)

Students are given a contemporary business-related topic to research on. They have to prepare a PowerPoint Presentation on that topic and present in front of their classmates. The presentation is videotaped and shared with students so that students can improvise their limitations. This activity helps in developing important skills of researching about the topic, using ICT to present it and communicate their research to audience. (It is observed that 80% of the students suffer from communication phobia; this activity helps them.)

- https://sites.google.com/site/presenation1011/ (Year 2010)
- https://sites.google.com/site/rppstd1109/ (Year 2009)

If World were a village… – Online Collaborative Project using Moodle

An Online collaborative project with students from Japan, Russia and India gives them a platform to discuss world problems such as terrorism, poverty, recession and unemployment in their respective countries and understand the perceptions of different people (especially, poverty has different notions to students from different countries.). This gave students a chance to exchange their view points and become more tolerant and understanding.

Other projects and activities
- ❏ Running of canteen and lemonade centers in the school by students of business
- ❏ Project ShutterBug – a photography contest for students
- ❏ Local and international case studies
- ❏ SWOT analysis and generating future CVs
- ❏ Management book reviews
- ❏ Taking part in Junior Achiever and other contests
- ❏ Online collaborative projects with students from other countries using Epals

- National Stock Exchange NCFM – financial literacy classes for students and parents
- Various workshops on body language, advertising, interviewing techniques, group discussions, business ethics, advertisement appreciation and other soft skills
- Inviting the successful professionals and alumni in the class to share their expertise and guide students with right career choice

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Wall Of

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Wishes...

Children are like followers! You teach them good they teach their students good.

Hats off to the best teacher in the world

Ma'am you teach well and softly and you are the best teacher. We all loves you you are pretty. When someone get hurt you are caring and what you can do you do it. When someone do bad things you tell us don't do. You are the best Ma'am.

Ma'am you are sweet and quite. We all love you and we think you also love us. If you will go who will give us time to play, who will teach us with kindness. Who will tackle our behaviour when we are noughty you are only one that can do.

Wall Of Wishes....

You were the best Ma'am I ever had, I will miss you very much" - a student on moving to a higher class.

On the occasion of Teachers day 1 wish you a beautiful Teachers day. You make me do Mathematics in a easy way. You make me love maths. You are strict but really caring at times.

The teacher I mostly look up to is Mrs ...... The reason why I'm writing her name is that she has a great will power, she is tolerant and a very nice teacher. She always helps me in my difficulties, praises everyone for their talent.

My favourite teacher is….. Ma'am . She is the best teacher in the whole world. She is strict, lovingful, honest pretty and gorgeus. She teaches me English and Social Studies.

When 1 heard about that you are leaving the school, 1 was sad because you are my favourite and best teacher in the whole world. Please don't forget us.

Dynamics of Teaching

'There are two kinds of teachers: the kind that fills you with so much quail shot that you can't move, and the kind that just gives you a little prod behind and you jump to the skies.'

Robert Frost

Teaching is an art as well a science. It is a science as it involves a repertoire of teaching skills that can be mastered scientifically through repeated practice. It is an art as it deals with humans (students) who need to be managed appropriately, keeping in view their socio-cultural background, entry behaviour, learning styles, etc. However, society considers teaching to be a simple task that can be learnt without much ado. Contrary to this belief, teaching is a complex activity that requires the right blend of human skills, managerial skills and scientific skills of teaching to be executed by the teacher in and out of the classroom.

Given below are a few pointers that every teacher should believe in and execute in his/her classroom to take her students along with him/her.

1. Sense of Humour

Humour can make a serious difference. In the workplace, at home and in all areas of life looking for a reason to laugh is necessary. A sense of humour helps us to get through the dull times, cope with the difficult times, enjoy the good times and manage the troubled times.

Likewise, sense of humour is an essential quality of a successful teacher. A teacher's sense of humour can relieve tense classroom situations before they become disruptions.

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2. Positive Attitude

Positive attitude is most easily arrived at through a deliberate and rational analysis of what is required to manifest unwavering positive thought patterns. First, reflect on the actual present condition of your mind. In other words, is the mind positive or not? Since the mind is both invisible and intangible, it is therefore easier to see the accurate characteristics of the mind through a person's words, deeds and posture.

For example, if we say, 'It is absolutely freezing today! I will probably catch a cold before the end of the day.' then our words express a negative attitude. But if we say, 'The temperature is very cold.' a simple statement of fact, then our expressions, and therefore attitude, are not negative. Sustaining an alert state in which self-awareness becomes possible gives one a chance to discover the origins of negativity. In doing so, we also have an opportunity to attain a positive state, so that our words and deeds are also positive, making others feel comfortable, cheerful and inspired.

A positive attitude is a great asset in life. A teacher may face a number of issues (a problem child, a non-cooperating colleague, aggressive head, etc.) common to the teaching profession. A positive attitude will help the teacher cope with these situations in the best way possible.

3. High Expectations

'High expectations' is a key indicator to success. Education is a shared commitment between dedicated teachers, motivated students and enthusiastic parents—all with high expectations.

An effective teacher must have high expectations. A teacher should strive to raise the bar for his/her students. If a teacher expects less effort he/she will receive less effort.

4. Consistency

All good schools have a vision or belief, i.e., student success. Schools achieve the belief by what they do—the practices used by the teachers. It is these practices that lead to student learning and achievement. Simply put, a school must have a set of procedures that are consistent from classroom to classroom. This consistency makes life easier for the students and the teachers, as everyone knows what to do, what is happening and what to expect.

Teachers need to be consistent. In order to create a positive learning environment, students should know what to expect from their teachers each day. This will create a safe learning environment for the students and they will be more likely to succeed.

5. Fairness

Many teachers confuse fairness and consistency. A consistent teacher is the same person at all times and in all situations. A fair teacher treats students equally in the same situation and wins the confidence of his/her students. Fairness implies demonstrating impartial, unbiased and equitable treatment towards others. How do you feel if you are cheated or left out from an activity you cherish?

In brief, fairness implies:
- ❑ treating all (students, colleagues and others) with honesty and respect,
- ❑ giving every child an equal opportunity to succeed,
- ❑ encouraging cooperation and collaboration
  (in the classroom and the staffroom),
- ❑ celebrating the uniqueness and value of everyone, and
- ❑ making sure no one is treated badly.

6. Flexibility

One of the tenets of teaching should be that everything is in a constant state of change. Interruptions and disruptions are the norm and very few days are 'typical'.

Feelings of worth flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are understood and appreciated, mistakes are tolerated, communication is transparent and open, and rules are flexible—the kind of atmosphere that is found in a nurturing setting. Therefore, a flexible attitude is important as it helps take control of any situation.

7. Autonomy in the Classroom

Autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning. (Henri Holec, 1981)

Autonomy is perhaps best described as a capacity, because various kinds of abilities can be involved in control over learning. For example, in a classroom, learners plan their own learning activities, monitor their progress, and evaluate their outcomes. Teaching is the only profession that gives room to teachers to be creative and autonomous each day. This motivates a teacher to be effective and at the same time promotes active learning.

Earlier, teaching was looked upon as a noble vocation that had an altruistic touch to it. Today it is pronounced as a full-fledged profession with an elegant commercial projection and minimum nobility. Nonetheless, a lot rests with the teacher who still holds the key to make the profession a meaningful one. The extent to which a teacher can create the right ambience in his/her classroom can make teaching and learning a rewarding exercise.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Transformational
Methodology

All educators aim to empower their students with knowledge and problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. However, this is a mammoth task. In the era of technology, accessing information is not as difficult as understanding and interpreting the information accessed for both teachers and students alike. Researchers are at work in the colleges of Oxbridge and the Ivy League, and theories are all around us to be picked up. But, how does one access and employ what is best suited for the individual contexts that each person works in?

In recent years, research on interdisciplinary instruction has thrown up interesting ideas. It is a keen contender as one of the transformational teaching methodologies. It is based on the premise that learning of subjects does not occur in isolation. Categorization of subjects is more for the convenience of schooling than for any other educational significance. Since 1979, many researchers have identified a number of gains from interdisciplinary instruction.

Students often bring powerful pre-learnt ideas and notions to the classroom. The ideas may not exclusively belong to the target subject dealt with in the classroom. Interdisciplinary instruction encourages students to examine previously gained knowledge in the light of what is learnt newly, thus enabling the students to get a broader perspective of the concepts taught.

Firstly, all teachers recognize that students are often rather adamantly biased about previously acquired notions. Interdisciplinary learning introduces students to ideas from a variety of subjects. This exposure challenges their existing notions and they

identify more ambiguous dimensions to their ideas. This is definitely one of the best ways to introduce critical thinking.

Secondly, interdisciplinary instruction, combined with collaborative learning helps students acquire the skills of questioning and analysing, which are essential for critical thinking. It is undoubtedly proven that interdisciplinary instruction promotes strong cognitive development as it involves brain-based processes required to carry out tasks. It engages students and teachers in discussions, leading to broader understanding of individual subjects.

It is common knowledge that different kinds of knowledge are needed for problem solving. Sometimes we need factual information and at other times process information. Students may discover that the same information when received in different forms may appear conflicting. This necessitates healthy dialogue in groups or pairs. Plenty of information emerges in the exchange of ideas, thus bringing out amazingly new perspectives to existing concepts.

Sometimes the same concept is interpreted in different ways in different disciplines, especially crisscrossing in subjects like Mathematics and Physics, or even Science and Literature sometimes! What better reason to shed rigid compartmentalized learning processes!

While we all know that the benefits of transforming pedagogy to interdisciplinary instruction is bound to yield better results in learning, implementation demands from the teacher more than mere knowledge of concepts at its surface level. Genuine concern for the learners and the learning process employed is an imperative requirement. This methodology not only transforms the way something is learnt, but transforms the learner's personality as well. As learning happens in a collaborative environment, the transformational teacher has to create a learning community in the classroom.

Some practical ideas that can be used are

- ❏ A class of forty students can form four mixed groups with some high, low and average achievers.
- ❏ Appoint a team leader for each group in consultation with the team members.
- ❏ Allot two days in a week for collaborative learning in the class.
- ❏ A lesson or topic is explained/taught in the class. Then the transformational teacher frames four questions that demand application of knowledge from all disciplines, covering all major aspects of the topic.
- ❏ Give each group a different question. Ensure all group members contribute to the activity.
- ❏ Monitor that everyone is involved in the discussion to arrive at points required for a conclusive relevant answer.
- ❏ Examine the conclusion of the groups critically and evaluate positively.
- ❏ Give another set of four questions the next day to be explored as an individual task.
- ❏ After evaluating the answer of each student, award group-wise marking/grading.
- ❏ Display the grades on chart paper in chronological order in order to encourage and motivate students to work towards achieving results in collaborative learning.

Benefits

- ❏ Working in groups will help promote the idea of peer correction.
- ❏ Discussion will foster the strengths and eliminate the weaknesses in the students' learning processes.
- ❏ A gradual positive change in their identity and personality will become noticeable.
- ❏ The teacher's 'self-report' as well as learner's individual and peer 'self-reports' before and after participating in transformative class will become the guiding principles to shape an appropriate strategy for the enhancement of adolescent adaptation and positive identity development.

Integrated curriculum may be considered as an effective solution to many problems related to curriculum. Interdisciplinary learning seems to have understandable capacity to serve the real purpose of education, that is, building of creative thinkers, not programmed robots to perform predetermined assignments. It is time for the central figures of education – the school and teachers – to analyse and accept the requisite transition from one phase to another.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wall Of Wishes...

Good Morning Ma'am. I am ... and wanted to wish you a very happy teachers day. You were the best teacher I ever had studied from and the most intelligent from my point of view. Thank you for your consistent encouragement.

Many competent teachers have taught me in school but the teacher I respect the most is Ms. ..... She taught me Maths in Class 5 and 6. We used to be very scared of her but on the first day with her she comforted all of us by introducing herself. She taught us in a way that we could understand the most difficult things easily. I was very disappointed when I came to know that she wouldn't teach me in Class 7. I hope that all teachers are like her.

Ma'am you are very special to me. You taught me to believe in myself and were always very helpful. I have never seen such a selfless, caring and helpful teacher before. I really like your teaching style and the way you interact with the class. I wish you a long life and hope to be taught by you in future though that seems nearly impossible dream.

Miss I've written this letter to tell a thing that I couldn't say four years ago, I just wanted to say sorry. I cannot forget that day when I didn't do my homework and talked even when I was punished. But now I'm old enough and have realized my mistake. I hope that you have forgiven me. At last Happy Teachers Day!

Wall Of Wishes...

Dear teacher you are the best. You are the most beautiful teacher in whole school. You are slimmest than the other teachers in the school. You teach us in a way we can understand the things very well. You are the noblest teacher ever I saw. You are better than the class teacher of my previous class. You are my dearest teacher.

Thank you for giving me knowledge to move on and taking care of me. Because of you I've reached till here.

Hi ... Ma'am,
How are you? Remember me? I am Soma from ... School 1994 Sc batch. I saw you on Priya's profile and have send a friend's request to you...hope u will add me too....saw your pictures after soooo long...u know Ma'am I am still a big fan of yours....in terms of your knowledge, intelligence and personality..... oh I want to write so much....but i guess i need to stop here and wait for your reply.....take care Ma'am...

The Role of Multiple Intelligences in Curriculum

—Designing an experience at The Riverside School

I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place.

Howard Gardner (Smith, 2002)

In your life, who do you consider intelligent? Why? What qualities or skills do they possess that makes them intelligent?

We all know people who are smart. Perhaps, it is the homemaker who is a culinary expert. Maybe, it is the businessman who is a whiz at numbers. Or, it might be your child who is a creative, out-of-the-box thinker. None of these people are considered intelligent because of their grades on the report card. It is because they are skilled in a particular area and are creative and innovate in a constructive way. When we interact with individuals or reflect on our own strengths and skills, we know that there are different aspects of an individual's competency. Thus, a broader definition of intelligence more accurately reflects the differing ways in which humans think and learn.

However, schools today continue to label and categorise children as 'intelligent' based on their performance as per one type of assessment measure. As we see in our daily practice, the ability to perform well in a written examination does not indicate that a student has fully understood the topic or developed the ability to apply it in the appropriate situation. It merely shows that he/she was able to memorise information for that short-term goal of passing the test. Standard tests 'cannot assess or predict a person's ability to learn, to assimilate new information, or to solve new problems.' (Helding, 2009)

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We know that a score in a test does not define who we are, nor is that how we want to be known. This is common sense. So, why then does the educational system continue to categorise students as intelligent or not, based on one system of evidence?

This is just one of the issues that bothered Kiran Bir Sethi, Founder/Director of The Riverside School. Her realisation that the word 'CHOICE' was being removed from the child's vocabulary and children were being labeled from their early years prompted her to examine the educational system. She asked herself, 'Who is a child?' and 'How can the choices schools make empower our children so that they can shape their future?'. These questions led Kiran to lay the foundation for The Riverside School in 2001.

In her quest to provide a no-compromise education of the highest quality, she began to research and study various educational theories, including Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences.

The Riverside School – Multiple Intelligences in Practice

At Riverside School, we believe strongly that every child can learn. However, teachers must know the child, understand their needs, and provide learning opportunities that match their abilities. Multiple Intelligences is a way to understand how students learn, so that appropriate learning experiences can be designed.

Case Studies
Interest Centres (Grades K1 to 2)

I am able to explore different sides of myself. I discovered areas of my personality that I didn't know existed. I became stronger in what I was good at and had the chance to explore areas that I didn't know about before.

—Riverside student after participation in Interest Centres

Interest Centres are sessions held once a week where students explore the eight intelligences. Over the course of one month (four sessions), students participate in activities that engage one particular intelligence. At the end of the session, the teacher notes down her observations of each student's responses and participation in the activity. Once the month is complete, students move on to the next centre, thereby, having explored each intelligence over the course of the year. The teachers undertake the Interest Centre based on their understanding of Multiple Intelligences and inclination towards a particular intelligence.

Once students have completed one round of all the Interest Centres, the teachers are able to identify the intelligence profile of each student. It also helps the students become aware of their areas of strengths and build upon them. This serves as an informal assessment of the student. It is this observation and assessment that enables the class teacher to design experiences to meet the students' need.

Audio Tour (Grade 2)

He enjoyed the entire process and was very clear about what he wanted to do. The experience has led to an increase in his confidence and self esteem. The biggest learning for him has been the understanding that your work and efforts get you respect. What more could the learning outcomes be?

—Parent of a student who was a part of the Audio Tour

The Audio Tour is aimed at making a space in the city (e.g. a zoo, a historical site, etc.) more engaging from a child's perspective. Students first identify a space that they feel can be enhanced and made more interesting for them. They then interact with the 'client' to determine their needs and requirements. Students work towards creating a product that meets both the client brief as well as their need to make the space more 'child-centric'. To create a solution requires students to identify their inclination towards a particular intelligence and take up roles and responsibilities accordingly. Each student gets an opportunity to explore his/her area of strength. Through this problem-solving process, students develop the skills and attitudes that can be applied in more than one setting.

More Than a Teacher

Artist in Residence (Grade 3 to Grade 12)

I saw that when children with specific abilities and talent are given opportunities to showcase this talent along with like-minded peers, they shine. The intervention by a passionate expert in the same field takes the quality of output to even greater heights. This understanding of quality and the confidence that they gain from it is reflected in their academic performance.

—Educator at The Riverside School

Artist in Residence is a two-week programme where students produce a theatrical performance. An artist in the field of performing arts spends time with students helping them learn the nuances of the art. It is a collaborative process where students from each grade in the Key Stage participate in one successful production. Students choose, are interviewed and selected for specific committees (e.g. script, costumes, dance, music, documentation, etc.) based on their talents and strengths. With teachers and the artist as guides, each committee uses a variety of languages for learning (e.g. videos, visits and interaction with experts) in their journey to create original works for the performance.

All of these were designed to consciously incorporate the Theory of Multiple Intelligences into the framework of the curriculum.

Multiple Intelligences

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences was developed in 1983 by Dr Howard Gardner, Professor of Education at Harvard University. It suggests that the traditional notion of intelligence, based on IQ testing, is far too limited. Instead, Gardner defines intelligence as 'the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural setting'.
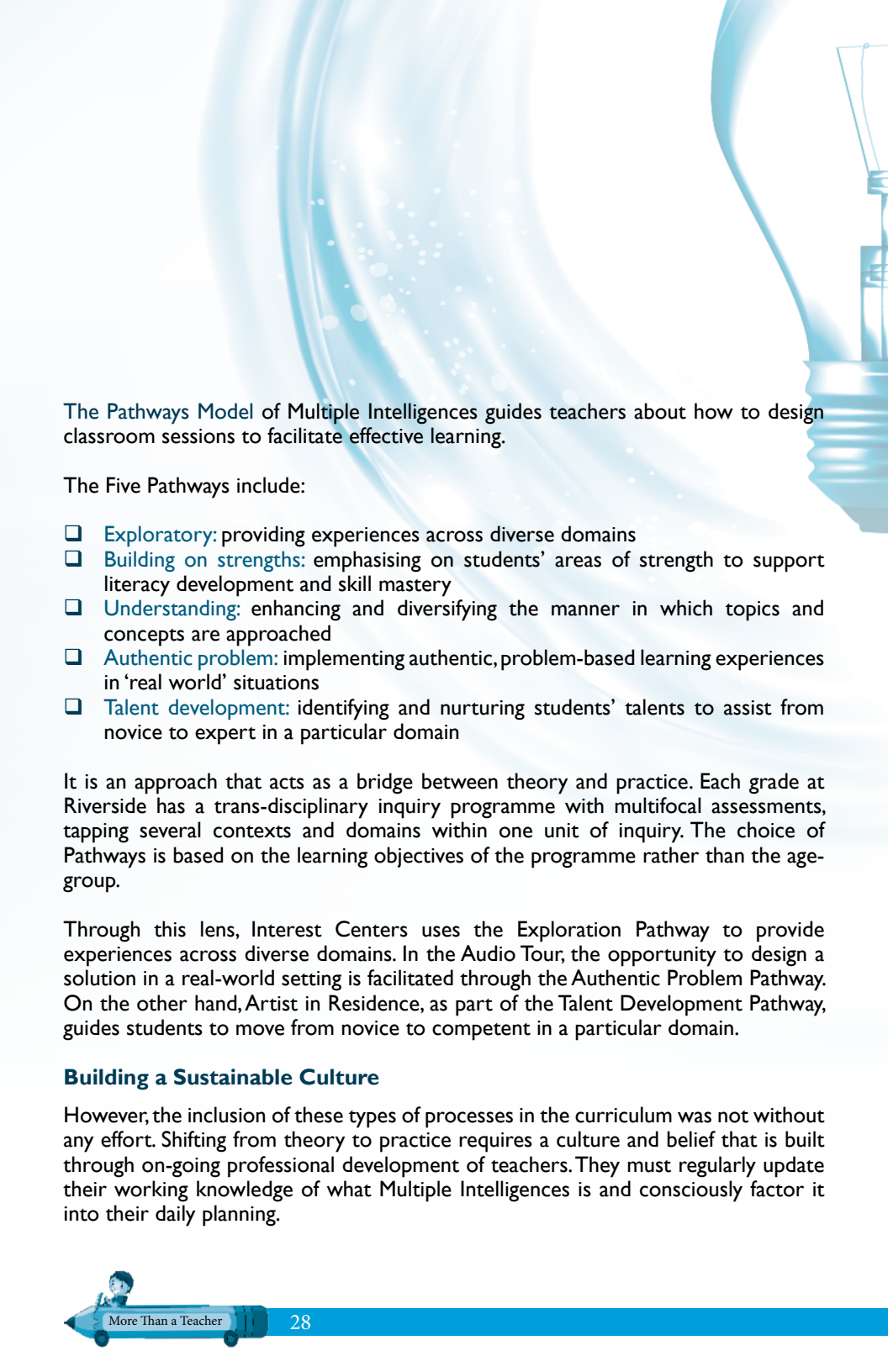
He proposes eight different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential in children and adults. These intelligences are:

- ❑ Linguistic intelligence: the capacity to use language effectively to express oneself, in either spoken or written form
- ❑ Logical-mathematical intelligence: the ability to understand the underlying principles of some kind of a causal system or manipulate numbers, quantities, and operations
- ❑ Musical intelligence: the capacity to think in terms of music, to be able to hear patterns, recognize and remember them, and even manipulate them
- ❑ Spatial intelligence: the ability to imagine the spatial world internally in your mind
- ❑ Bodily–kinaesthetic intelligence: the capacity to use your whole body or parts of your body to solve a problem, make something, or to put on some kind of a production
- ❑ Interpersonal intelligence: the ability to understand other people
- ❑ Intrapersonal intelligence: having an understanding of yourself, of knowing who you are, what you can do, what you want to do, how you react to things, which things to avoid, and which things to gravitate towards
- ❑ Naturalist intelligence: the human ability to discriminate among living things as well as show sensitivity to other features of the natural world

(Baum, Viens, & Slatin, 2005)

Teachers and parents around the world know that every child is different. Each child thinks differently, acts differently and has his/her own skills, personality and capabilities. Yet, instructions are delivered day after day in the same manner. The traditional school model typically places value and emphasis on the development and use of linguistic and logical mathematical skills. Teaching caters to the 'one size fits all' philosophy. It does not take into account the myriad ways in which students learn. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences suggests that teachers structure their classroom practice to engage students in varied intelligences. This theory helps educators think about their practice and validates the teacher's everyday experience in the classroom.

More Than a Teacher

The Pathways Model of Multiple Intelligences guides teachers about how to design classroom sessions to facilitate effective learning.

The Five Pathways include:

- ❑ Exploratory: providing experiences across diverse domains
- ❑ Building on strengths: emphasising on students' areas of strength to support literacy development and skill mastery
- ❑ Understanding: enhancing and diversifying the manner in which topics and concepts are approached
- ❑ Authentic problem: implementing authentic, problem-based learning experiences in 'real world' situations
- ❑ Talent development: identifying and nurturing students' talents to assist from novice to expert in a particular domain

It is an approach that acts as a bridge between theory and practice. Each grade at Riverside has a trans-disciplinary inquiry programme with multifocal assessments, tapping several contexts and domains within one unit of inquiry. The choice of Pathways is based on the learning objectives of the programme rather than the age-group.

Through this lens, Interest Centers uses the Exploration Pathway to provide experiences across diverse domains. In the Audio Tour, the opportunity to design a solution in a real-world setting is facilitated through the Authentic Problem Pathway. On the other hand, Artist in Residence, as part of the Talent Development Pathway, guides students to move from novice to competent in a particular domain.

Building a Sustainable Culture

However, the inclusion of these types of processes in the curriculum was not without any effort. Shifting from theory to practice requires a culture and belief that is built through on-going professional development of teachers. They must regularly update their working knowledge of what Multiple Intelligences is and consciously factor it into their daily planning.

Also, the relevance of the practice must be made visible to parents. They may question how these kinds of experiences will help students cover curriculum content and build academic skills. It is the responsibility of the school to bridge the gap between the school and home through regular communication, such as workshops and parent meetings.

Conclusion

Common sense tells us that the world not only needs doctors and engineers but also artists, writers, and dancers. We need citizens who are creative, imaginative, empathetic and proactive. At The Riverside School, the theory of Multiple Intelligences is used as a tool to design learning spaces that keeps the child at the centre and brings common sense into common practice. It provides opportunities in the classroom for a child to use his/her inclinations to promote growth and nurture curious, independent, and forward- thinking learners and citizens.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

More Than a Teacher

A Teacher Remembers…

I wanted her to come for the movie so much, it would have been a rare treat for her; I was ready to pick up and drop her because I knew her parents couldn't. On the designated day, my eyes searched for her in the crowd of the fifty eager girls. I couldn't spot her so I decided to take the attendance. It took a while for me to reach Roll no 43 but there was no response when I called out her name. I looked around again, hoping she would be chatting animatedly with her partner. She hadn't come, my heart sank. The pleasure of taking the class for a movie in a plush cinema waned, as for me it had hinged so much on the sparkle I would have seen in her eyes. I had planned to treat her to those obscenely expensive popcorn packs. Now they would lose their flavour for me.

I sat on my chair pretending to be marking my register while actually the words were swimming in my tears. One of the boys was at my desk and animatedly telling me about his trip to the Vatican. I barely responded, not looking up. My mother was in the ICU right now 3000 miles away, after a botched up heart surgery. There was nothing I could do about it, not even see her. All I wanted to do was to start crying, I prayed fervently for solace, till something the boy said penetrated my mind. When I looked up his hand was extended towards me with something curled up in his fist. 'I've got God for you,' he said. He opened his hand and inside it was a beautiful cross. It's not just teachers who provide support to students – it works both ways.

I looked at the crumpled notes in her hands. She told me she had collected it by buying fewer soft drinks and smaller chips packets. It had taken her 2 months to put ₹110 together. I pushed the can for 'Blind Relief' towards her, and with a look of pride on her face, she pushed each note and each coin into it. Her 'Zara' dress and her 'I – phone' had not given her so much joy, she said.

All the graduating students milled around the teachers, as they bade farewell to their school life. Without looking up, I signed his t shirt with the usual inspirational message, but as I was about to turn away, he held my hand. I looked up in surprise to catch an expression of pure reverence in his eyes. 'Do you remember me?' he asked. I pushed aside his bearded image to look at the boy beneath; he was my favourite student from my first batch of teaching, not because he was well behaved or bright but because he challenged me to pull him out of his complacency, of being in the top slab of performers but not at the top. I smiled at him and hugged him as he told me that I had taught him to believe in himself and beat the best.

—Vandana Rellan Juneja

A Different *Experience*

A teacher has to don several hats while dealing with her students. Sometimes she's a teacher, sometimes a friend, and at other times she assumes the role of a mother figure. Whatever role she's called upon to play, she does so willingly with a smile. Here's an account of a little girl who blossomed under the loving care of her kindergarten teacher.

Sanjana:
A Case Study

The Child

Andrea Sanjana is the name of the child who was 3 years old when she came along with 47 other children to my LKG class at Chettinad Vidyalaya, Chennai. This child had come from the USA, but her mother had remained behind on account of her job and the little girl was living with her father and grandparents.

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The First Month at School

The first day she cried and clung to her father and refused to come into the class. I had to literally pull her from her father into the classroom; I did feel bad while doing so. She stood the whole day crying and refusing to even sit or eat. This continued for a whole month. She was a day care child as well, so after the regular classes were over she had to move to the day care center, but she would refuse to go with the caretaker. She even lost weight in the course of these 2 months. In the middle of the class she would ask me to call her father to take her home.

My Response

I used to keep her beside me all the time, while handing the class of 48 children (we are 2 teachers in our class). I would make her sit on my lap for some time every day. I understood her insecurity in a new environment without her mother. So, a little more care was given to her. I even escorted her in person to the day care center at times. I used to feed her in the dining hall to ensure that she had some food. I used to talk to her telling her that her father had to go for work and that children had to learn and play, and make new friends. I did not force her to write, I focused on her to settle down and be comfortable in school. I used to draw stars and smileys in her hand whenever she did not cry. All this went on for around 3 months.

The Changes

After 3 months she started to eat by herself, started writing, and even answer during the class. She caught up with the class and did well in her work also. She also made friends and played with them. Finally she started to enjoy school. Her confidence level rose so high that she started going around the school by herself.

My Learning

If we approach a child with love and care, they will surely come around and do well. It is very important to listen to the child and keep the parents informed about their child's activities in school. A lot of patience is required to turn the child around.

Even when Sanjana got promoted to UKG, she would come to my class daily to greet me.

It gave me immense satisfaction to see her happily coming to school to learn and play. Her parents wrote a lovely letter to the Principal thanking us for our efforts.

Dear Principal maam-

Sanjana is our daughter and she is studying in LKG 'J' Section. We are sure all of the LKG teachers would know sanjana because of the tantrums she would throw every morning as one of us drops her at school. There were days when the teachers would have to physically rip her apart from me and put her in class, she would go the whole day without food, at the day care center, she would refrain from doing any activity, not sleep and keep watch till we come back to pick her up. This was the case for nearly 2-3 months. The teachers would tell me everyday that she had not eaten anything and that her crying would last for a couple of hours. Sanju even lost a lot of weight.

We were very concerned about her. However what took us aback was the love and care of Ms.Maheswari and Ms.Veera. They would literally keep Sanju in their laps the whole morning since only then Sanju would stop the crying. When we leave her in the morning, sometimes I would see them carrying her. They would draw nice little stars in her hand when she does not cry. Most of all what touched us most was that, they really cared for our daughter just like their own. In a class of 40-50, I am sure it must be tiring enough for the teachers to get the other kids focused on class stuff, inspite of that they took special care of Sanju - knowing that she was relocating from the US and is having additional difficulty of adjusting. Also added to this was the fact that I (mom) had to travel back and forth and was away from her for a long period of time - adding to her insecurities.

Maheswari and Veera ma'am are real assets to the school. Their patience, care and concern blows us over!

Dearest Maheswari and Veera ma'am-

You would not know how much we are thankful that you were Sanjana's teachers. we cannot fathom how she could be what she is now without you both. We see that she has more than settled in well at school (has put on weight - even has chubby cheeks)....and now is happy to go to school.

I am sure you will remember those days - when Sanju would cry non-stop, clinging on to our clothes and never wanting to let go. She would say 'come soon' a zillion times, and all the dialogues of inseparable love ☺ we are glad that you helped us get over that phase of her life. Words would be really inadequate to express what we feel at the bottom of our hearts. May everything that is good and blessed come your way always.

With lots of regards,

Sanjana's parents
9/3/2012

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Raising the
Emotional Quotient
in the Classroom

EQ actually stands for Emotional Intelligence Quotient. Much like an Intelligence Quotient, or IQ, an EQ is said to be a measure of a person's Emotional Intelligence. However, there is much debate surrounding the legitimacy of a definition of Emotional Intelligence Quotient, primarily because there is no standard against which it can be measured.

Research on EQ was initiated by Yale psychologist Peter Salovey and John Mayer of the University of New Hampshire in the late 1980s. EQ as a concept was further popularized by Daniel Goleman, another well-respected psychologist who has written many books on the subject and is co-chair of The Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organisations. While they and many other subject experts view EQ as a scientific study of social behaviour and relationships, the actual science behind measuring EQ is often convoluted at best. Regardless of the actual scientific basis of measuring EQ, the concept is used in many different settings.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to perceive, control and evaluate emotions. Some researchers suggest that Emotional Intelligence can be learned and strengthened, while others claim that it is an inborn characteristic.

In my career as a speech and drama teacher and an unofficial part-time counsellor, I have realized the importance of the Emotional Quotient in solving teenage problems (or at least dealing with them, as 'solving' is too ambitious a word for teenage problems). Teenage is an age when hormones work overtime and the child, if he/she may be called so, is treated as a young adult. A young adult, let me point out, is a person who is treated as an adult when circumstances are befitting, and treated as a child when circumstances are not befitting – a very painful and confusing situation to be in.

I did not teach Vikram's class (name changed) but reports of his bullying and beating up the other boys at will were legend and soon crept into my ears as well. I was ultimately asked to 'handle' Vikram and so I summoned him one day, but forgot all about it. I was updating the register after class when he walked in and stood close to me. In keeping with my usual habit, I kept on working but reached out for a hug which I do with all my students (this was in the good old days when a touch could not be constituted as sexual harassment). He broke down and sobbed uncontrollably. It was then that I looked up from my work and realized this was the dreaded Vikram, the bane of existence for most teachers and students.

I hugged him close and he held on for dear life, an obese boy, 14 years old and quite forlorn. After he gained control, we talked about the colours I liked to wear, my and his favourite music, and the fact that his father used to beat him regularly on the slightest of pretexts. A big guy himself, his father could pack quite a punch. Vikram could not fight back, but the young man in his teens rebelled against the physical abuse with no outlet for his frustrations.

So the weaker boys in school became his target. The wrongdoer was more wronged against than we were aware of. We blamed him for being a bully and made an example of him as a 'bad boy' in the assembly when the silent teenager in him screamed, without a voice, for justice.

To cut a long story short, I immediately took up the matter with the school principal, who wasted no time in calling in the father and taking whatever action she felt was necessary.

Vikram sings and dances very well for his size and is the star actor in my class. He is artistic, melancholic, moody and immensely talented. He has little time for bullying now, being actively sought after by the school Dramatic and Cultural Club.

There are no sure-fire tactics of dealing with or understanding teenagers or any child, for that matter. The persona of a teenager does not start developing from the age of 12 or 13. The process starts much earlier and the warning signs, if any, are evident from as young an age as 6 to 7 or even 3 to 5. The environment, both in school and at home, parental behaviour and relationships, as well as inherited factors play a critical role. A teenager is a result of both nature – characteristics or preferences the child is born with, as well as nurture – abilities and qualities or even negative and positive habits that the child develops as a result of his/her upbringing and influence of other external factors. Here, without going into too much detail, I will highlight two major points which might help you to understand your teenager better.

More Than a Teacher
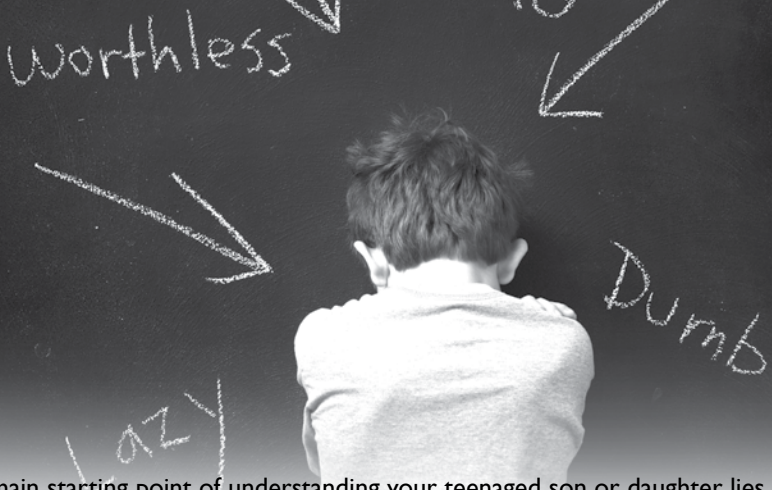
I feel the main starting point of understanding your teenaged son or daughter lies in understanding yourself. Are you a person who buckles easily under pressure in front of them, or one who has stopped having respect for others' opinions and points of view? Are you a good listener? In the case of most people I come in contact with, and that does not only include parents, I have found this quality lacking. When your teenager is trying to explain something from his/her point of view, do you usually form an opinion in advance, because you feel the child is too young to be dealing with such things? And usually you are not really listening when he/she is speaking but working on what you are going to say next after he/she finishes?

This might come as a shock but in the case of at least 70 per cent of the teenagers whom I have counselled, I have found that the problem lies with parental attitude. For example, if you treat people rudely, including the maid or the driver, and are ill mannered in public, be sure you will have a very misbehaved teenager on your hands as unconsciously or consciously the child is aping you.

Now, I come to the second point. Fussy or overprotective parents, and, to go to the other extreme, overcritical parents can destroy the self-esteem and confidence of the teenager. Such children become more prone to peer pressure and may do things just to please their friends and feel 'accepted' by them as they do not have the confidence to stand up for their own judgment and principles. It has been observed through numerous studies that individuals with high self-esteem have a greater strength of conviction in their beliefs than those with a low self-esteem.

I feel that if we keep these two critical points in mind it would go a very long way in helping us understand our teenagers and nurture better, confident and balanced adults.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

11

School-based
Counselling Services
Emerging Needs,
Concerns and Practices

Children are the most important assets of any country and the most important human resource for overall development. Schools are one of the settings outside the home where children can acquire new knowledge and skills to grow into productive and capable citizens, who can involve, support and help their communities to grow and prosper. We have entered the new millennium and as part of a rapidly changing society, it is imperative that an appraisal be made of the psychosocial needs and influences on the child and adolescent who is carrying the baton of human chain in the 21st century.

With nearly 10-12% of children in our country needing professional help and guidance for emotional and behavioural problems, the role of school counsellors for a positive school climate is indeed paramount. The need to work with school children having such problems was recognized as early as the beginning of 20th century, especially in the USA. By the middle of this century it had drawn the attention of several professionals—social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and psychometrics—each one contributing towards the development of these services. It soon influenced the educationists and mental health workers in our country too. NCERT and CBSE have often highlighted the growing need for effective school-based counselling services.

It is wise to remember that the school plays a crucial role in the development of cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and moral functions and competencies in a child. Schools have profound influence on children, their families and the community. They can act as a safety net, protecting children from hazards that affect their learning, development and psychosocial well-being. In addition to the family, schools are crucial in building or undermining self-esteem and a sense of competence. These programmes are effective in improving learning, mental well-being, and channelising management of mental disorders. When teachers are actively involved in mental health programmes, the interventions can reach generations of children. Research shows that the incidence of mental health problem is increasing worldwide.

This throws additional challenges for developing countries including India, which are finding it difficult to provide basic health amenities to the population.

Also, the responsibilities of school counsellors have increased tremendously over the years. School counsellors are to be integral part of the whole school community working to help children, teachers and other school personnel and parents. School counsellors facilitate children to face challenges, peer pressure, friendship problems, depression and more—all of which can be roadblocks to future success.

Among other interventions, schools have been recognized as significant institutions where positive mental health can be promoted among students. School counselling services therefore have relevance for both our education and health systems. In our country it appears to have a closer association with the former. Notwithstanding the fact that it can play a significant role in providing tertiary (mental) health services, sufficient efforts have not been made to view it in that context.

In this emerging context, India is in need of taking a serious stock of the school-based counselling services as the planning bedrock for the implementation, enhancement and monitoring of overall holistic development of children. This needs to be a value addition to the educational reforms already underway.

School Counselling Services in India – Emerging Objectives

❑ Identifying the overall needs of counselling services for children in the regular schooling system.
❑ Sensitizing schools towards the growing need for comprehensive counselling services and well-being.
❑ To streamline the structure, protocols and guidelines for the school counselling services across the country, thereby strengthening the existing infrastructure and human resources for the same.
❑ Setting up uniform guidelines/centres of excellence in health research in partnership with the education system, to enhance the psychosocial well-being of children attending schools.
❑ Linking the education system with the local/regional mental health services and professionals for a qualitative monitoring of the programme.

It is proposed that the initiatives should involve collaborative workshops at the national level and a longitudinal multicentric pilot study to evaluate the implementation of the aims and objectives of the said project.

Counselling is a learning-oriented process, which occurs usually in an interactive relationship, with the aim of helping a person learn more about the self, and to use such understanding to enable the person to become an effective member of society. Counselling is a process by means of which the helper expresses care and concern towards the person with a problem, and facilitates that person's personal growth and brings about change through self-knowledge. The aim of the counselling process is to primarily facilitate behaviour change, improve the individual's ability to establish and maintain relationships, enhance coping skills, promote decision-making and facilitate individuals goals. The counselling process, like in a school setting, can be divided into three progressive stages, namely, initial disclosure, in-depth exploration, and undertaking action.

At the beginning, the counsellor and the counselee do not know one another well. Therefore, establishing rapport becomes the first task; without honest self-disclosure by the client counselling in an empty enterprise. Attending (paying careful attention to the client's words and actions) is very important. The counsellor must promote trust in the client by showing empathy (understanding others' experience as if it were your own), genuineness (or dependability), unconditional regard (total acceptance of the client as he/she is) and overtness (using clear language to describe the counselee's life situation).

During in-depth exploration, the counsellor brings into the discussion his/her impressions of the counselee's dynamics and coping behaviour. The counsellor tries to obtain the counselee's response about whether the counselling process is progressing satisfactorily or not and also expresses his/her opinion about the progress achieved in a few counselling sessions. This stage frequently becomes emotionally stressful because the counselee repeatedly faces the inadequacy of habitual behaviour and must learn to give up the old behaviour for the new behaviour learnt during the counselling process. Also the counsellor and counselee come to a mutually acceptable assessment and diagnosis of the problems.

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Lastly, decision-making takes place and action is undertaken. The counselee considers possible actions and then chooses some of them to try out. The counsellor gives support for trying new behaviour and helps the client evaluate the effectiveness of new behaviour.

Facilitation of Skills of a School Counsellor

Students might seek advice from various sources, like their parents, teachers, friends, and so on. But, a counsellor has inculcated specific skills as professionals. A counsellor:

- ❑ is non-judgmental, non-critical, avoids prejudices, and presumptions.
- ❑ has curiosity, inquisitiveness, and a natural interest in people.
- ❑ has the ability to listen and finds listening stimulating.
- ❑ is comfortable with conversation and enjoys verbal exchanges.
- ❑ shows empathy and understanding and can put himself/herself in another person's place.
- ❑ displays emotional insightfulness and is comfortable dealing with a wide range of feelings.
- ❑ is introspective and has the ability to see/feel himself/herself from within.

Dynamics and Benefits of School-based Counselling

Bringing about a change in behaviour enables the student to live a more productive, satisfying life as the student learns to define it in accordance with social rules. Improving the student's ability to establish and maintain relationships helps in improving the quality of their relationship with others. Many students have problems relating to other people probably due to poor self-image causing them to act defensively in relationships; or it may be seen as the result of inadequate social skills. Therefore, a counsellor helps the student develop and maintain healthy relationships with others. Enhancing coping skills is another important dynamic of counselling. For a variety of environmental, biological and psychological reasons, children may find it difficult to cope with adversities or challenges of everyday life, e.g. examination, peer pressure, failures, emotional setbacks, traumas, etc. The student may exhibit physical and psychological problems like frequent headaches, inability to sleep, etc. A counsellor works with the student to develop healthy coping skills. The promotion of decision-making helps individuals obtain information and clarity and sort out personal problems and emotional concerns that may interfere with, or be related to making decisions. It helps these individuals to acquire an understanding of not only their abilities, interests and opportunities, but also of the emotions and attitudes that can influence their choices and decisions. Facilitating student potential can be viewed as a goal towards improving personal effectiveness. Counselling seeks to maximize an individual's freedom within the limitations imposed by his/her own self and his/her environment.

Responsibilities of a Counsellor – the New Paradigms

Towards the students

A professional school counsellor has a primary obligation towards the student who is to be treated with respect as a unique individual. He/She is concerned with the educational, career-related, emotional and behavioural needs of students and encourages the maximum development of each student. The counsellor refrains from consciously encouraging the student's acceptance of values, lifestyles, plans, decisions and beliefs that represent the counsellor's personal orientation. He/she is responsible for keeping himself/herself informed about laws, regulations or policies relating to the students and strives to ensure that the rights of the students are adequately provided for and protected.

Towards the parents

A professional school counsellor also respects the inherent rights and responsibilities of parents towards their children and endeavours to establish as appropriate, a collaborative relationship with parents to facilitate the maximum development of the student. He/she adheres to the laws and local guidelines when assisting parents experiencing family difficulties, which are interfering with the student's welfare.

Towards the school

A professional school counsellor supports and protects the educational programme against any infringement not in the best interests of the students. She must inform appropriate officials about conditions that may be potentially disruptive or damaging to the school's mission, personnel and property. He/She assists in the development of a) curricular and environmental conditions appropriate for the school and community, b) educational procedures and programmes to meet the student's developmental needs, and c) a systematic evaluation process for the comprehensive school counselling programmes, services and personnel.

More Than a Teacher

Ethical Issues in School Counselling

While counselling children, or anyone for that matter, counsellors often are faced with ethical issues that need to be dealt with delicately. These ethical issues relate to:

- ❑ Confidentiality: Counsellors are ethically obliged to keep the information of the student confidential. This means that a counsellor should not talk to anyone about the student's problems without prior permission from the client.
- ❑ Professional disclosure: A counsellor must represent his/her professional qualifications and experiences correctly to the student.
- ❑ Professional relationship: Counsellors need to respect and protect their students. This means that counsellors should not engage in any other kind of relationship with students that could put in doubt the counsellor's objectivity and judgement and interfere with the therapeutic process.
- ❑ Disclosure to competent authority: Whenever the best of judgement and evaluation points towards a potential harm to self and others or property, its disclosure to a competent authority or guardian is to be initiated.

Summarising the issues

Most programs designed to improve schooling fail because they do not adequately address the developmental needs of children. The key to academic achievement is to promote psychological development in students.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The 'Mind' of a Teacher

Since many decades, psychologists have been greatly involved in what is called as the 'Nature-Nurture Debate'. In exploring the make-up of the human personality, some think that it is nature which determines how we are and will be. It is all that we have got from our parents, grandparents and ancestors. On the other hand, nurture is the environment that we live in. It can be of different types, for example physical, social, psychological, etc. One's environment consists of all the people surrounding that individual who eventually have an impact on him/her and his/her personality. So right now, instead of deciding upon only one factor as the sole determinant of human personality, psychologists have come to believe that it's the combination of both nature and nurture that shapes the human personality. Nature sets a sphere for development. But within that sphere, it is nurture which helps individuals to achieve their fullest potential. When we talk about nurture, we are mainly talking about the parents, teachers and other significant people that exist in the person's life. After parents, it's the teachers who are responsible for an individual's intellectual, emotional and social development. Without teachers, the growth of a human being would be woefully incomplete.

But then a question comes to my mind—if we consider 'teachers' as an inevitable part of 'nurture', then what are the different ways in which a teacher plays a significant role in the development of a child's personality? Again, a psychologist and personality theorist comes to my rescue. Albert Bandura, a social learning theorist believes that we are made by what we observe in the people around us. So all the significant people in our lives serve as role models for us. With the help of detailed observations and experimentation, we internalise some of the traits and behaviour of these role models. When a child goes to the pre-primary and primary school, his/her favourite game is playing 'Teacher-teacher' (especially in girls). Next, in the first half of the secondary school, the child is more interested in how the teacher teaches and how he/she behaves with the whole class. Students talk more and more about the teachers they like and why they like them. If the parents teach a concept in a way that is different from the teachers, it is just unacceptable. Only the teacher's way is the right way. Then, in the last three years of secondary school, students seem to be more concerned about the command and expertise the teacher has over the subject and his/her views and reflections about life in general. At this age, students are rebellious and do not seem to be interested in or receptive about what and how he/she teaches and the values he/she inculcates. Due to this, even the teacher might get frustrated and disappointed at times. But all these influences on the student's mind, are latent and sometimes three-four years down the line, they start thinking about the same teachers in a very different way. So the journey of a teacher as a role model begins with students emulating his/her external characteristics, then his/her behaviour and teaching methods, which are still overt, and then finally moves on to internalising what the teacher thinks about the various facets of life.

More Than a Teacher

The social learning theory invariably means that teachers have a lot of responsibility on their shoulders. Each and every behaviour trait of theirs in the school is going to hold some meaning for the child. Nowadays, because of the huge number of students in each class and because of the heavy workload which they carry, teachers might become a bit agitated. When a teacher is teaching a class of 60 students who are very active and sometimes mischievous, getting the work done by them becomes a difficult task. In this process, controlling one's temper might become difficult. This then results in using harsh verbal punishment. But many a times, when we are extremely annoyed or angry, we fail to understand the intentions behind a person's actions. We use very harsh language to reject the person, instead of rejecting the unacceptable behaviour. Research in psychology suggests that harsh punishment in any form can have a long-term impact on the development of the child's personality, especially his self-esteem. But when a teacher goes out of the way to find out what is going on with the child and makes sure that he/she is happy in school and gives time to his academic concerns, his/her influence stays with the child for life.

Teaching is not only a job, but a profession of service. The teacher is constantly helping the students and at one point can easily feel emotionally exhausted. This extreme phase of physical and emotional exhaustion which sets in after many years of service is called a 'burn-out'. A burn-out commonly happens with people in helping professions. So it is also important for teachers to take care of themselves so that they can take care of others. To deal effectively with burn-out, teachers can cultivate hobbies. Whenever needed, they can vent their thoughts and feelings to a counsellor. If teachers feel happy and satisfied with themselves, only then the passion and vitality in teaching can remain alive.

Finally, when I look at teachers from the psychological point of view, I feel that every teacher already has a counsellor in him/her. Teachers are quite skilled at understanding the classroom situation and the group dynamics within the class; they identify the strengths and weaknesses of each student, can understand the child's problem and why he/she behaves in a particular way and also finds out ways to work out a solution with him/her. A teacher also talks and consoles the parents, other teachers and the students themselves. So awareness on her part about her importance in students' life can take the students a very long way.

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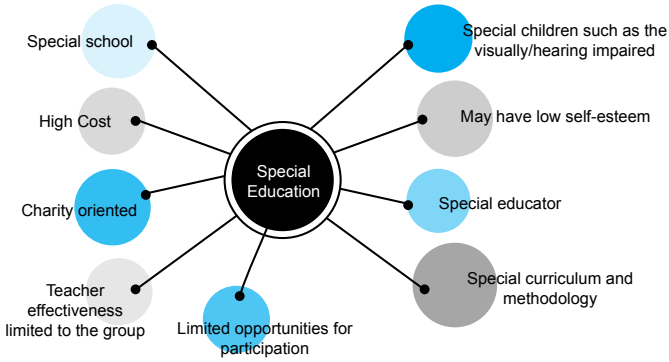
The Inclusive
Classroom

Inclusion implies including children with special needs in a regular class with other children. It is based on a child's right to be with other children. The term inclusive classroom means that all students have the right to feel safe, supported and included at school and in the regular classroom as much as possible. In an inclusive classroom, it is important that the teacher fully understands the learning, social and physical needs of the students.
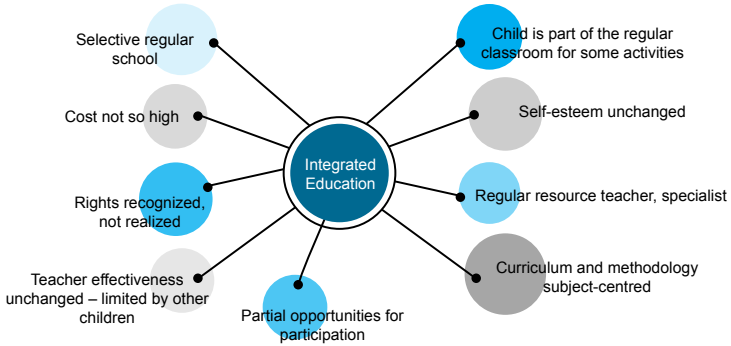
What are special needs?

A special need can be defined as any need of a child that is beyond the usual. If we go by this statement, then each day is different. On a given day, a child who has been scolded by his/her mother will have special emotional needs. A child with a fracture has special physical needs. A child whose parents are going through a separation will have special needs. A child whose spectacles break in the playground is a child with special needs. But all these are time-bound and situation-based special needs. A child with a disability has special needs that go beyond the constraints of time and situations.

There are many kinds of disabilities: social disabilities (like autism and Asperger's syndrome), physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities, genetic abnormalities that affect more than one aspect of one's life and learning disabilities. The needs that each one of these has are specific to the child. If we club all these children together, we won't do justice to any child.

More Than a Teacher

Special school

High Cost

Charity oriented

Teacher effectiveness limited to the group

Limited opportunities for participation

Special Education

Special children such as the visually/hearing impaired

May have low self-esteem

Special educator

Special curriculum and methodology

Selective regular school

Cost not so high

Rights recognized, not realized

Teacher effectiveness unchanged – limited by other children

Partial opportunities for participation

Integrated Education

Child is part of the regular classroom for some activities

Self-esteem unchanged

Regular resource teacher, specialist

Curriculum and methodology subject-centred

Child goes to the neighbourhood school

Most cost effective

Rights recognized and realized

Teacher effectiveness in including all children in the learning process

Equal opportunities for participation

Inclusive Education

Child is part of the regular classroom

Least restrictive

Class teacher

Curriculum and methodology child-centred – constructivist

Difference between Special, Integrated and Inclusive Education–

Sometimes schools do not define their approach to education due to lack of clarity on the various options available to them. Three approaches that can be practised are special, integrated and inclusive education. The difference between the three approaches can be understood through the charts given on the previous page.

In a mainstream school that is aiming towards inclusion, one of the most important steps is sensitization of the people. But it's a long list to handle—peers of the children, teachers in the mainstream class, activity teachers, parents of the child in question, parents of other children in class, the helpers in schools, and so on.

A Teacher's Role in an Inclusive Classroom

A teacher has a special role to play when trying to maximize the learning potential for students with special needs.

Step 1 Observation is the key—knowing what to look for is critical

- ❑ Does the child give up easily?
- ❑ Does the child persevere?
- ❑ Is the child able to show how he/she got the task right?
- ❑ How closely does the individual remain on task? Why or why not?
- ❑ How does the student feel about the activity?
- ❑ What are his/her thinking processes?
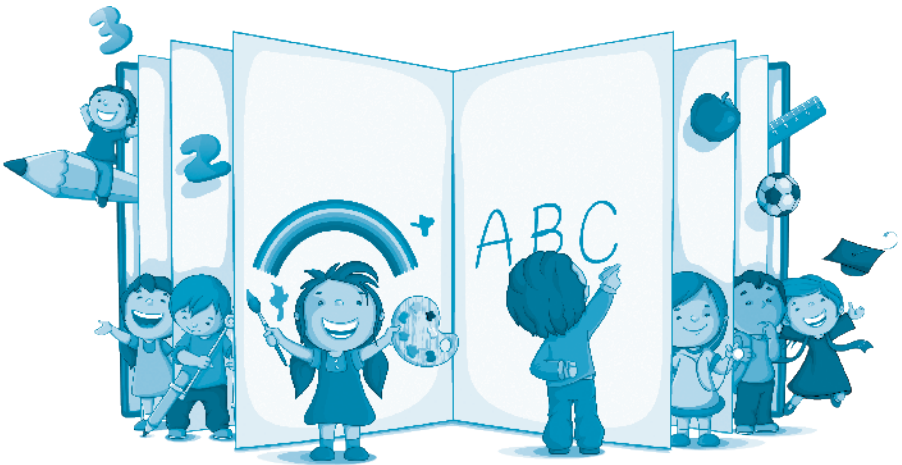
The teacher could target a few learning goals per day and observe a few students on a daily basis for goal attainment. The teacher facilitates the learning by encouraging, prompting, interacting and probing with good questioning techniques, such as 'How do you know it's correct? Can you show me how?' For instance, in a spelling activity, a student may choose to cut and paste the letters from newspapers or use magnetic letters to work over spellings. It becomes the educator's role to create a welcoming environment and provide students with as many opportunities as possible to learn, share and engage in all classroom activities.

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Step 2 — Physical environment of the classroom

This can help or hinder the process of learning for children with special needs. This in turn, can affect feelings of belonging, success and self-esteem. Carefully planning out the physical space of the classroom strongly supports an inclusive learning environment. To list a few—ramps or lifts for children on wheelchairs, disability-friendly classes and corridors, low sound work areas for children with ADHD and children on the autism spectrum, alternatives to sound cues like the bells to mark the end of the period for hearing impaired children, special tactile cues for children with visual impairment. Therefore, creating an inclusive learning environment isn't just about changing attitudes, support systems and activities; it is also about rearranging the physical space to accommodate the various needs that these exceptional children have.

Below are some suggestions that can be used to arrange the physical space of a classroom in order to facilitate inclusion.

❑ **Place Student Desks in Groups:** Put the desks in small groups (2-4 desks per group) so that all students have opportunities for cooperative learning, collaboration and discussion. The teacher's desk should be placed on the periphery of the classroom. Teachers in an inclusive class rarely sit down during their day and don't need their desk getting in the way!

❑ **Provide Learning Centres:** Centres appeal to various learning styles but they must also be accessible and open. The materials at each centre must be appropriate and stored in a place that is easily accessible. Placing books on a high shelf is limiting for a smaller student or one who is in a wheel chair.

❑ **Meeting Spot:** Create one area of the classroom where the students can come together to have discussions, develop social skills and participate in large group activities. This space must have enough room for all the students to gather.

❑ **Classroom Decor:** An inclusive classroom needs to be decorated in a way that does not create distraction and sensory overload. Too many bright colours, posters, clutter and furniture can easily distract the most focused child!

❑ **Safety/Emergency Preparedness:** Ensure adequate space for all students to move safely around the room. Clear bulky items, stabilize furniture, tape down wires and cables, and place signs/symbols around the room that point out exit/entry points in case of emergency.

Step 3
Modify the classroom teaching methods

Make curricula flexible and process-oriented, and alter the daily routine expectations from the children. Students with disabilities must be free to learn at their own pace, and have accommodation and alternative assessment strategies in place to meet their unique needs. They need to experience success.

A popular saying goes, 'If I can't learn the way you teach, teach me the way I learn.' It may be a done-to-death line, but the truth that it portrays is undeniable. In most instances, classroom teaching involves reading, listening, copying and discussions. In such a scenario, we are seen helping children who are primarily auditory learners and to a limited extent, visual learners. But where do we address the needs of a tactile or a kinaesthetic learner? The need is to indulge the special learners through activities and projects.

Step 4
Use peer support in the inclusive classroom

This is one of the most essential ingredients in the inclusive classroom setting. Peer support helps to build up rapport and a sense of belonging and camaraderie among students. Students with special needs often become the targets of inappropriate behavioural conduct from other students. Having members of the class become peer supporters, the problem of teasing/bullying is often minimized. Appreciate and reinforce efforts of students who are willing to help such children with special needs. For example, a student who possesses a good speed in copying or writing notes from a book or the board can help those who are slow.

More Than a Teacher

Involve the parents of children with special needs

One can't even begin to enumerate the daily challenges these parents face. Imagine if every second of our life was a battle to be fought, and fought with courage because others, and most importantly your own child, were watching you. It's a fight against family, friends, neighbours, schools, the education system, the attitude of people who are supposedly a part of their lives, and even strangers on the road. It is here that a lot of work is required with patience. The things we expect of them are not small; we need them to accept the child as she or he is. We need them to help him/her develop their skills and to help with reinforcement of the learning that happens. We need them to face the pressures of the world, society and not pass them on to the children in the form of unfair expectations.

We have a long way to go in this direction, where we make them feel special (not deprived or insensitive) and provide the support to face life with all its challenges. But first of all, we need to accept the parents with their anger, guilt, frustration and even envy.

Overall, inclusion is a goal we need to aim for. While treading on this path however, there are a lot of hurdles that we need to overcome. And how far we are on that path is an unknown factor, as of now. Each society has charted its own course on this path and we all learn as we go. There is nothing completely right or wrong here. Nothing is certain. What works for one may or may not work for the others. Thus, it's a unique model that we require for each child, each family and each society.
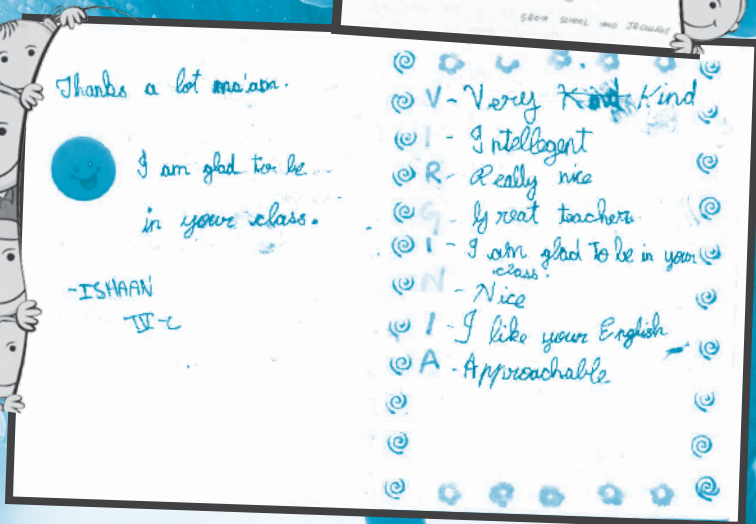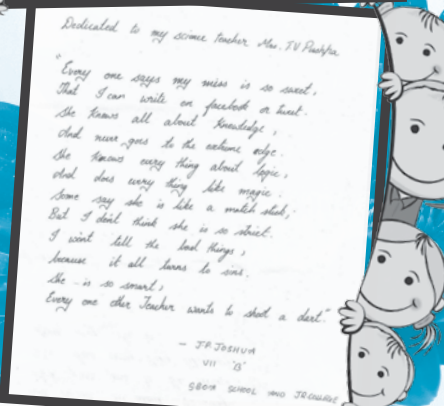
The aim is to help all children, irrespective of their disabilities, to be able to learn, enjoy, play and grow while taking care of their physical and emotional needs.

Dr Jitendra Nagpal
Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Moolchand Medcity, New Delhi

Letter to a teacher...

LALITHA MA'AM'S PRASHASTI

hose teaching brings back to life long-lost kings and civilisations, whose voice is weet like honey, whose grace is atched with no others and whose mile and never ending knowledge teals everyones heart is none ther than our History teacher ri Sri Sri Lalitha Ma'am, our guru

Dedicated to my science teacher Mrs. T.V. Pushpa.

"Every one says my miss is so sweet,
That I can write on facebook or tweet.
She knows all about Knowledge,
And never goes to the extreme edge.
She knows every thing about topic,
And does every thing like magic.
Some say she is like a matchstick,
But I don't think she is so strict.
I won't tell the bad things,
because it all turns to sins.
she is so smart,
Every one dear Teacher wants to shed a dart."

— J.P.JOSHUA
VII "B"

Thanks a lot ma'am.

I am glad to be
in your class.

—ISHAAN
IV-c

V - Very Kind
I - Intelligent
R - Really nice
G - Great teacher
I - I am glad to be in your class
N - Nice
I - I like your English
A - Approachable

A World
of Difference

Working with children or adolescents with autism is a 'challenge' for many teachers, especially those who have not had the opportunity to understand the problem from the eyes of the child who is diagnosed with it. When we develop the 'difficult to handle' attitude, it limits our understanding of the problem. This makes us miss the obvious needs of the individual with autism and leads to many 'problem behaviours' (stress behaviours) and 'learning problems' the child develops over a period of time. A child with autism has differences. These differences, with a little bit of understanding, and a clear, structured plan from the teacher can make a world of a difference to the child for whom we can be a key to opening up the whole world of learning.

Differences in Communication

In a country like India, we have all had experiences where we have been unable to communicate with another person either because our cultural beliefs, religion, language or upbringing was different from theirs. Getting stuck in a tourist destination without any knowledge of the local language or customs is what many individuals with autism face every moment of their lives within the seemingly 'secure' surroundings of their own homes or school. Naturally this is a stressful situation and will spark off some difficult behaviour in the individual, which the caregivers may not understand, because they follow a totally different system of communication. This leads us to label the individual with ASD as 'difficult to handle'. As a tourist in an unknown place, you speak in your language as loudly and clearly as possible. But it will not help the other person understand your needs because the basis for the communication is not the same. If you lose your temper because you are not able to get across to the other person you will be labelled like the individual with autism who exhibited 'problem behaviour (stress behaviour)'. What we need to do here, then, is to become like the street smart taxi driver or tourist guide who observes carefully and learns to communicate important messages or information in every language to cater to the need of every tourist and benefiting in every way from the business it generates. We need to start observing and listening to unspoken words, look at gestures carefully, and understand unexpressed needs and emotions. We need to learn from our child or adolescent who has a totally different language and set of rules and gestures for communication. We need to understand what these words, gestures, needs and emotions mean. Once we begin to understand the behaviours that make them 'different' from us, it will be easier to communicate with them and also get them to understand what we expect from them. This will gradually facilitate the learning process and two-way communication.

More Than a Teacher

Differences in Thought

Several 'distortions' in thinking contribute to the differences and the stress behaviours in individuals with autism.

We normally make predictions about other people's behaviour based on our own understanding or assumption of what they are thinking, feeling or intending. In autism, this knowledge or awareness of the other person's mental states is missing. This leads to a difficulty in predicting or understanding behaviour and leads to the states we label as 'aggressive', 'difficult', or 'weird'. They are stress behaviours in response to the inability to process information within human interactions. This interferes with learning especially communication and social skills.

Many individuals with autism have problems in planning, monitoring and directing their own activities. They often have problems in modifying their behaviour in relation to the feedback. Learning is more often a set of repetitive instructions, tasks and details, not an experiential exercise involving the instinctive use of meaning or learning from the past. In short, many individuals with autism do not use 'insights' from previous learning experiences while learning a new task.

Imagine that you are a little child learning to use a toothbrush for the first time. The only difference is that you cannot understand it with any of the meanings you now hold in your mind about your teeth, the toothbrush, the bathroom, the water, the toothpaste, the towel or anything you associate with the task now as an adult. To make matters worse you do not understand the language in which the instructions are being given to you. See what would happen to you and to the process of learning.

❑ You do not know where your body is and therefore cannot understand where your teeth must be. To complicate matters further, there is a mirror in front of you and it confuses you even more because you are doing something in one place but can see it somewhere else. Many individuals with autism are unaware of the self and find it difficult to locate and use their own body parts even when known instructions or cues are given to them. That is why objects, pictures and verbal cues are repeatedly given to them within a planned and fixed structure.

❑ You now hold in your hand an object you do not know or understand. So you look at it the way you would look at an ancient text from the ruins of Egypt. Because it makes no sense to you, you end up quickly memorizing the parts that are most attractive to you or easy to remember. So maybe you look at the pink colour of the toothbrush and learn it as 'when this 'pink thing' is thrust into 'this part' (the hand), this is what I am expected to do, and if I do it this is what I will get'. You mechanically process the event without any meaning. When you try to mechanically remember an unknown ancient text as a set of figures or details in a particular sequence, colour, texture or form devoid of the meaning, you end up taking in some details but cannot actually say that you have learnt it or that you understand it. As a result, when the text is presented to you differently or only if a portion of it is presented to you in another colour, texture, place, context or sequence you need not necessarily understand it, because you have memorized it as a totally different set of details. Going back to our example, you have associated 'brushing' (without the name or the meaning) as a mechanical activity once you locate the body and the teeth and learn to handle or avoid the mirror with a pink object. Realize now that it will become a totally new activity if you are given a blue or a red brush. This is the nature of thought in many of our children and adolescents with autism. This is why they have a need for sameness; prefer routines, schedules, repetitive behaviours, rituals and structure. Respect this need for using details as a means to learn as it is difficult for them to instinctively add meaning to whatever is presented to them. They see every experience as we would see the ancient text (without meaning) and therefore process every experience only as a set of details. They try to make a learning experience meaningful and exert control over new or stressful situations through the use of such details. If the details are altered in any way a previously learnt behaviour cannot take place as it becomes totally new information to process.

Differences in the Sensory System

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is often mentioned as a major hurdle in the learning process of many individuals with autism. Going back to our example, you now know that once you locate your body and your teeth, and are taken to the bathroom and given the 'pink thing' in your hand, you are expected to move your hands on your teeth till you are asked to stop. What if you could not tolerate or process the smell of the toothpaste or the soap kept in one corner of the bathroom, the cold water on certain parts of your body, or if the lights were too bright, and you could only hear the drops of water falling onto a metal bucket and not the instructions being given to you? In addition, you cannot tolerate the sound of the air inside the hollow pipes of the sink and you are not aware of how much pressure to put on the 'pink thing' or how to move it. Would all this not make the whole experience of learning so many more times difficult? If you resist, you are forced. There is no escape but to resort to a stress behaviour which can sometimes be self-injurious because you will be let off

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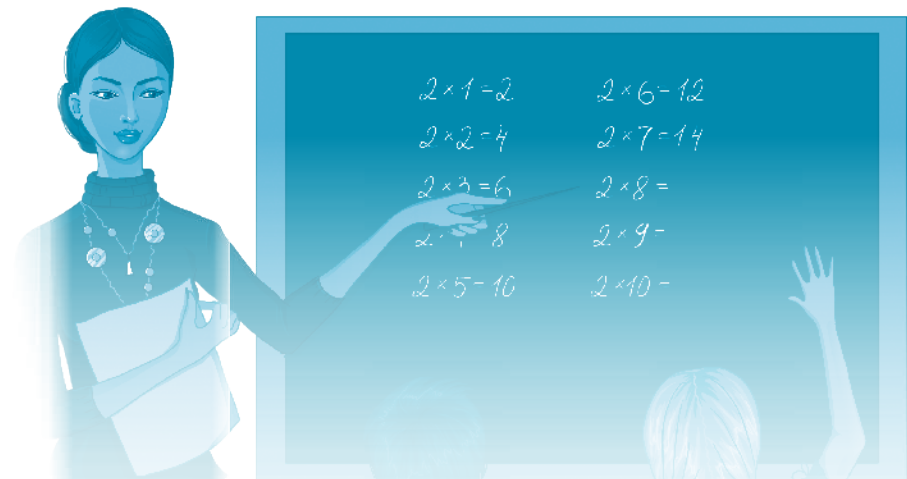
and need not perform the task. This is how SPD interferes with learning and creates stress behaviours. Our senses are channels for input of information that will facilitate learning and if they are unable to carry the correct information because they are hypo or hypersensitive, then the learning process will be greatly affected.

Differences in Learning, Memory and Attention

Individuals with autism take in information with little analysis or integration. They take in many details and do not put them together. Individuals with autism may repeat the same mistakes as they have difficulty learning from experience. Though they may do extremely complex tasks, their problem solving skills also involve details and not meanings, experiences or insight.

Coming to memory, individuals with autism have excellent ROTE memory, long term memory and eidetic memory. But they cannot attach any meaning to the information that they have memorized. They can use rehearsal to remember but not semantics (can use mechanical repetition but not meaningful association). We need to use encoding information with meaning to understand information and to remember it. In autism, adding encoding or meaning will worsen memory.

Individuals with autism can attend to stimuli but often cannot control their attention. It is often difficult for them to activate, sustain or shift their attention. In reality, many children may want to actually complete a task or learn a new activity but since they have very limited control over their attention they are usually either 'distracted', or are fascinated by something else that may seem trivial to us but may be very significant to them. For example, we may have a very interesting activity, well planned in front of us for the child to do. But the child may just be fascinated by a small mirror on the teacher's dress and the whole task may fall through as they cannot shift their attention from the seemingly 'trivial' mirror.

We need to recognise and understand these special needs of the individual with autism and consciously adapt the methods of teaching, the environment, the instructions and the goals to suit them with the support and guidance of therapists and special educators.

Working with Autistics

Setting Goals

Goals set in a therapeutic or academic setting must be in line with the needs of the child and not those that are significant for the teacher or caregiver.

❑ Health and Safety
❑ Communication
❑ Social Skills
❑ Academic or Vocational

While working within each of these areas use the following rules for setting the tasks and the goals:

❑ Simple to Complex (Goals and Tasks) – If a task seems very difficult for the child to do, then break it down to simpler steps so that the child will be motivated by the success he/ she experiences on completion of the task.
❑ Known to Unknown (Tasks and Concepts) – Use already familiar tasks as a means to introduce new tasks.
❑ Whole to Part (to develop meaning and understanding) – For example, teach whole words through flash cards instead of making them mechanically memorize the alphabet and then teaching them to form new words.
❑ Concrete to Abstract (to help the child make meaning of the details) – Use objects and actions first, then use pictures and associate them with the name or the instruction. Finally use words alone. Also tell them what to do as concrete actions and not as abstract instructions. So instead of saying 'Stop fidgeting', we say 'Put your hands in your pocket.'

Planning and Structure

Plan Ahead: You need to plan every session with your child well in advance keeping in mind the goal, the activity, the reinforcement, the problem behaviours likely to be encountered and the sensory issues if any, to be handled.

Known to Unknown: Start with already well acquired/known skills and then move on to introducing new tasks. Avoid changing activities too often and too soon as this will surely lead to stress behaviours.

More Than a Teacher

Clear Structure: The physical space used for the session must be well structured. So, if a child has a particular place where teaching 'concepts' is done, it must not be clubbed with the place where 'eating skills' are done. This will interfere with the details in the child's thought. Also have specific places and times for every activity. Label everything with flash cards. So, words like 'table', 'chair', 'door', etc. will be clear to the child during the session.

Seating: If your child needs to develop eye contact, you need to always sit at a lower level facing your child. This way there are more opportunities to make and to sustain eye contact. Do not force a child to make eye contact. Be spontaneous while trying to establish eye contact. Do not make it a regimental drill. Sing, play, show objects at eye level and slowly and enthusiastically encourage every effort made by the child to 'process' your face. It is said that many individuals with autism avoid eye contact because there are just too many details to process. This is because our facial expressions keep changing and each expression holds hidden meanings that are difficult for the individual with autism to understand. Therefore they find it easier to just avoid making eye contact.

❑ If your child needs to be trained in doing a particular task or activity, then the seating arrangement must be different. Here the child faces a plain wall. You sit behind the child and gently guide him/her with verbal or physical cues related to the task or activity. For example, if the task is 'stacking cups' then sit behind the child with the cups on the table. Slowly mould your hands onto your child's hand and gently do the activity. Once your child understands this, move your hand gently onto the child's elbow, and gradually to the shoulder. Take at least a week to move from the wrist to the elbow and then at least another week to move from the elbow to the shoulder. Sometimes it may take longer. Over a couple of weeks, the child would have mastered the task without the use of the physical prompt (your hand guiding at the wrist, elbow or shoulder level). Do not rush to give the prompt at the shoulder. Give your child sufficient time to process the information being presented. Rushing through a task will surely lead to stress behaviours. Give appropriate reinforcement when each task is completed.

❑ If you are working with your child on a task that involves speech or communication, the seating arrangement will be different. Here usually there are two trainers or teachers for the child. So one person sits facing the child and the other person sits behind the child. The person behind the child is the 'shadow' or the 'voice'. This method is particularly effective in reducing echolalia* and in prompting verbal communication. It also works well in non-verbal communication using pictures. For example, the person facing the child asks 'What is your name?' In typical echolalia, the child would just repeat the question. However in this method, the moment the question is asked, the person who has assumed the role of the 'voice' or the 'shadow' immediately answers the question in a word. This way the child repeats only the answer. Slowly, with repeated attempts over a period of time, a particular question elicits the appropriate answer from the

child. The same can be done with picture cards as well. The question about the task is asked and the 'shadow' can assist the child with appropriate physical cues (wrist, elbow, shoulder) as mentioned earlier.

{*Why does echolalia occur? Imagine that you are learning a new language that is totally different form the one you speak or understand now. What do you do when there is a sentence or a question that makes no sense to you? You repeat the sentence or question verbally or mentally in an attempt to understand it. The repetition may not really help you but you still do it. In the same way an individual with autism repeats words or sentences when they are unable to understand the meaning and when they do not know how to respond to it.}

Start and Finish: It is essential that the child has a clear idea of when a task starts and when it ends. Without clear rules, the task can trigger off stress behaviours.

I personally use two trays – one green for 'start' and one red for 'finish'. Start with only one simple task in the 'start' tray. Slowly you can add more tasks onto the tray. Let the child pick up a task from the 'start' tray, complete it on the table and then move it to the 'finish' tray. Once all the tasks in the 'start' tray are completed and the 'finish' tray is full, the child gets a reinforcement, a time-out or can move on to the next activity on the schedule.

This method is easy and effective as it uses structure and respects details. Once children understand the object level communication, each of the tasks on the tray can be associated with a picture that can go onto their schedule.
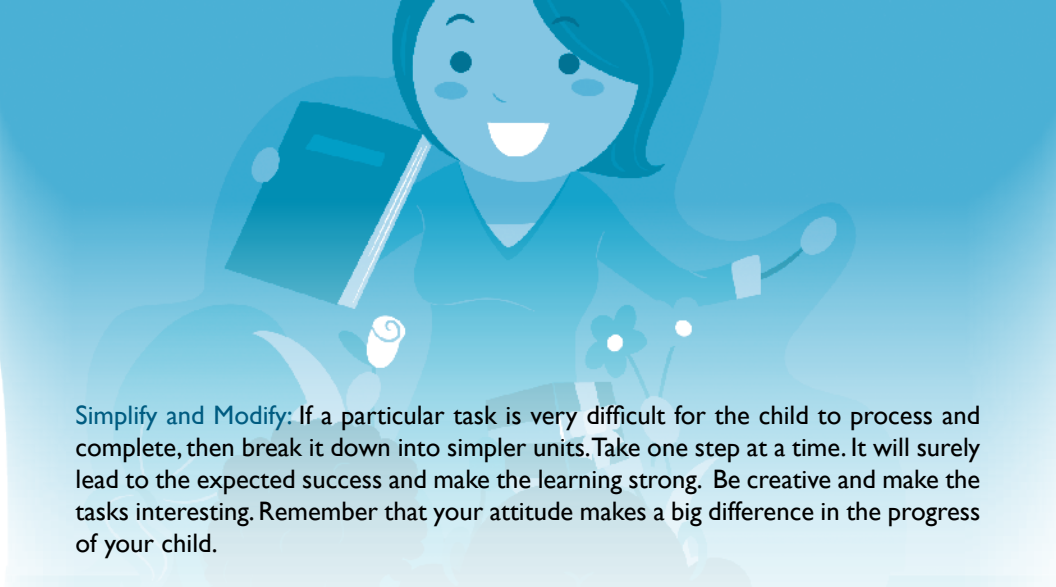
Use the following steps:

		play	play
1. **Object Level:**	2. **Picture Level:**	3. **Picture Cue + Word**	4. **Word Level**
Ball is used to communicate 'Play'. It is given with appropriate verbal and physical cues.	The picture card with a ball is used to communicate 'Play'.	In this stage the picture size slowly reduces and the size of the word becomes larger.	Only the word is used to communicate the activity. If the child is higher functioning the word can become a sentence.

More Than a Teacher

Be clear on what has to be done, how much has to be done, when it ends and what comes next. Always work from top to bottom, right to left, as it will later help us handle academic skills in the same manner.

Completion: Emphasize on completion of every task. If a child is never taught how to complete a task he/she will never learn to complete a task. So if you are teaching a child to do a four-piece puzzle, first start by giving the puzzle tray with three pieces already fixed. Let the child fix only one piece and experience completion. Reinforce this. Slowly present the puzzle with fewer fixed pieces and let the child complete the task each time. Gradually, the child will fix all four pieces. They will now be ready for larger puzzles (if puzzles are part of the goals set for the child). In the same way, if dressing skills are being taught and there are five buttons on a shirt, when the task is presented to the child, four buttons are already done and the child needs to do only the last button and experience completion. Slowly let the child work on more buttons. This way they will not only learn the task but also learn how to complete it. This will give clarity to the child thereby enhancing learning.

Never add more work once your child has finished the task or set of tasks. When we do not respect the schedules and tamper with the idea of 'finish', it will surely lead to stress behaviours. If you feel that your child is ready for more tasks then give a brief 'time-out' and then present the additional tasks as a totally different tray of activities to avoid the stress behaviours.

Simplify and Modify: If a particular task is very difficult for the child to process and complete, then break it down into simpler units. Take one step at a time. It will surely lead to the expected success and make the learning strong. Be creative and make the tasks interesting. Remember that your attitude makes a big difference in the progress of your child.

Be open. If a particular method does not work, reflect upon how to make it work. You may need to simplify it, vary it or change it.

Children with autism are often visual learners. Therefore they learn what they see. Present visually appealing information, with specific and limited details.

Go slow with every task. It is better to go slow with a task than to rush into a task and allow the child to develop stress behaviours.

To summarize, remember that when we are working with individuals on the spectrum there will be:

❑ Differences in rate of appearance of physical, social and language skills. They may skip certain stages and may exhibit extreme skills. Autism is very often characterized by uneven skill development across various areas of development.
❑ Differences in responses to sensory stimuli (sensory processing disorder).
❑ Differences in development of communication. They may not have the fluency we expect and may often find it difficult to use pronouns, understand and use jokes or sarcasm. Some may remain non-verbal too.
❑ Differences in ways of relating to people, objects and events. This is because they 'process' everything differently.

Understanding and respecting these differences is the first step. Try everything, never give up, and reinforce every step along the way. Be sure to work along with a good psychologist, occupational therapist, speech therapist and special educator who can guide you with the goals and the stress behaviours or sensory issues. It is not the giant leaps alone that we consider success but every tiny step along the way. Every step will make a world of difference for the child with autism.

More Than a Teacher

Aarti C Rajaratnam

Aarti C Rajaratnam has a Masters in Applied Psychology with specialization in Clinical Psychology - Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health from the University of Delhi, South Campus. She completed a special 14-month internship at the prestigious Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Child Guidance Centre at New Delhi. She is a Master Practitioner and Trainer in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and is also trained in Transactional Analysis (TA), Dream Analysis and Counselling.

She is an Innovative Curriculum and Education Design Consultant and has been instrumental in designing innovative classrooms and curriculum models in India and abroad. She has set up schools for children in the rural areas of India to cater to the needs of first generation learners to ensure that their educational and nutritional needs are met. This model of education has increased retention rates and reduced dropout rates, truancy and delinquency among children. She helped rehabilitate over 7500 children in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu after the tsunami in 2004 along with partner NGOs and teachers working in local schools. She developed and implemented a model of reaching out to children affected by the disaster through art, music, play and drama.

Aarti is the Director of Kriti Play School, a preschool in Salem, the focus of which is stress-free education for children through an eclectic model specially designed to nurture young minds through a thorough analysis of learning styles. In addition to this, she has a special therapy centre for children with developmental disabilities and pervasive developmental disorders like autism. She has a child guidance centre and a counselling clinic where she uses a combination of therapies from the west and the east, to touch the lives of children with varying degrees of psychological and educational problems. She also counsels adults with problems and mental illness.

Aarti has trained teachers, professionals, parents, students and HR teams on a wide range of topics and issues, and has truly left a mark on every project that she's worked on.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR