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INDIA SCHOOL NEWS

The online school newspaper

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How did you get into the education career?

I hail from a family full of teachers. My uncle, my father, my cousin, etc. all are teachers. In my family I have teachers ranging from professors to secondary-school teachers. My wife and sister are also teachers. So, I have a whole big background there. Having said that, this background was not the sole motivator behind my becoming a teacher.

I studied in a government school. I was born and brought up in Mumbai. My father was a government school teacher, which was Hindi medium –the vernacular medium we had back then. Till grade 10, I studied in Vernacular medium and I always wanted to become a mechanical engineer and make fighter planes for India. When I heard that India bought these planes from Russia, I kept wondering why we don't make the fighter planes ourselves.

My dreams and enthusiasm took a back seat when I got to college. I had a tough time in college because I did my schooling in Vernacular medium. English medium in college took a toll on me and it felt like my world was crashing down. I couldn't understand a word they taught because till date the only words I knew in English were whatever was taught as English as a subject alone. I had an extremely tough time and needless to say, I didn't do very well in Grade 12. From the 84% I secured in Grade 10, my exam results tapered down to 57% in Grade 12.

I didn't try for Engineering and I went for my further studies to a degree college. That is where I decided that there was, perhaps, a lot I could do to help students like me, who come from national medium – who may have big dreams and suddenly they get hit by reality of a language barrier pulling them down. The fact that I fell from an above average student in Class 10 to an average student in Class 12, told me that many people will need some hand holding to pursue their dreams. I felt they needed people who could tell them that it may take a while but they will get around it.

I could say that with conviction because eventually that is what happened to me. I went for my BSc, MSc, etc. and reverted to scoring Distinction level marks again. The difference was that in my graduation days I got teachers who were very supportive. They kept chanting that I may take a little more time, but I sure would get there. That is when I realised that the support they gave me was something which was far bigger than I ever imagined doing. That is how I decided that I want to pursue teaching a profession.

From the very beginning, I was very clear that I don't really need to teach geniuses, because they can do well with minimal or no support. They just need direction. According to me, teaching is a necessity for those who struggle. It is required for either those who are heading in the wrong direction or the less confident ones, etc.

That is how teaching happened for me.



Where did you graduate from?

I did it in Mumbai University. Like I mentioned earlier, in grade 10, I was in vernacular medium and in the year 1995 to score an 84% in Grade 10 was extremely difficult, which I did.

Of course, nowadays it has all changed. I cannot understand how people score 100% in a language paper. If you ask me, even as a student, I would think that impossible even if my teacher would have taken an exam in language. Even they wouldn't aim for a full 100 marks in language. But nowadays I see children scoring 100 in languages. Somehow, I feel, the scoring system has become unrealistic.

What happened after you cleared your MSc?

My first job was when I was doing my MSc. One of my friends, named Joy Jacob, was working in some school and wanted to resign owing to a better offer at hand. The school's condition was such that if one needed to leave, one had to provide a teacher for the school, before one left. In 2nd year MSc, we are supposed to go for lab classes and it was okay if you weren't present in class for all lectures. You just had to maintain your attendance at an optimum level.

So, when my friend asked if I could step in for a few months, I agreed. I didn't mind trying. It was another beginning and at the back of my mind the fact that I was a vernacular medium student once upon a time still played at the back of my head. By the time I cleared my BSc, I could converse in English. But standing in front of a class and talking is a different ball game altogether.

So, that is how I landed my first opportunity. I was expected to teach Science for Grade 7 to Grade 10. This school was one of those schools who don't really have the philosophy of educating people. They look at it as a business, to come up with a school in a slum and function it just for the fees. My first hands-on experience was with such a school.

That is how my journey began. Then, I completed my MSc and after that came what I consider my first break. I got to teach in my own alma mater, in Bhavan's College, Andheri, Mumbai. I was taken in by my own HOD on a clock on basis.

At that time there was this clock on basis wherein your pay depends on the number of hours that you teach. But, that was of least priority for me. My excitement was that I was going to teach in my own college. For me, that was a big thing. It was like a dream come true to be promoted from classroom to staff room and being seated with your own teachers.

Having said that, the charm of the dream kept fading away because you get Rs 85 per hour and that too after three months and then sustainability becomes an issue. Then, I understood that this situation could not go for long because it did not support me as a professional.

That is when I started looking for other opportunities and realised that if I wanted to be in the teaching field, I had to either do my NET, SET or I had to go for B Ed.

Now, for NET, SET the problem was that it was littered with the quota system and a lot other formalities. So, I opted to do my B Ed. With MSc, B Ed, you can teach up to grade 12. Likewise, my teaching career took shape in a Podar School that I joined, and after that, I have worked in a number of schools.



Looking back, was the B Ed course actually useful for you?

Frankly speaking, nobody ever saw how much I scored. I scored a first class in B Ed and a Distinction in my MSc. One thing I realized was that all these certificates and mark sheets etc. is just your first step.

The start of your career life can perhaps be decided by your mark sheet, but how high you jump or how far you go has nothing to do with your mark sheet. In that perspective, B Ed and all is just a pass for starting your career. It helps to get you into a good organization.

Once I got placed in a good organisation, wherever I went after that, I don't recall anybody ever asking me my mark sheet. The institution admin section takes a copy and keeps it as part of their paper work – that's all. I don't even see people reading it.

So, my belief in marks is quite less. I talk to my students and tell them that their marks are not a true reflection of who they are. It doesn't hurt to do well, no doubt. But that is neither the end of everything nor is it going to fetch you everything.

One of my students recently adorned the role of a Physiotherapist. I remember she was very poor in studies when she was in Grade 7, which was around 7-8 years back. I used to tell her that it doesn't matter. What matters is that you are very dedicated and as long as you are dedicated, life will bring to you its goodness.

I am very happy that this has come to work. My philosophy now has become Let Us Learn for Learning. Marks may get you the admission. But it doesn't matter much.

In the 16 years of my teaching career, I have seen students going to top most colleges and filling up seats. I have also seen students going to ordinary colleges, and turning out to be really good and leading a good life. It is not about the college or the teacher. It is all about you. You make or break yourself.

Admission is something you may secure on the basis of your marks. It ends there.

Has your dad been your inspiration?

It sounds obvious. But, actually my father wasn't really my inspiration. I respect my father a lot for a lot of things but I was not inspired to teach because of him.

See, my father had 6 children to raise and he used to work in 2 schools, which means he was working day in and day out. He used to work for a day school and night school to earn enough to keep his family going. He himself was the 14th child of his parents. He had 14 siblings. I am not sure if you understand, we hail from the North and the system there is you earn money and your money is spent towards a lot of obligations you need to fulfil.

So, I don't see him as an inspiration. My father didn't get to spend much time with us. Poor fellow couldn't even teach me at times. In fact, initially I had an aversion to the profession because I have

seen my dad struggle so much to make ends meet. I felt it was not worth it.

When I went to Degree College and struggled a lot, I felt that my life was over. It was some of my degree teachers, and before that another teacher in my 5th grade, who had assured me that life will go well.

There are two teachers that changed my life. One was Mr Mishra. I was in grade 5 and I was known as the child of a teacher. But, I was so weak in studies that I couldn't write $\frac{2}{3}$ correctly if it was told out verbally. If teachers said that verbally, I would literally write 2 and then I would write the word upon in Hindi.

Mr Mishra once asked me if I was Mr Yadav's son. In fact I used to pass many of my exams because I was known to be the child of a teacher. But, Mr Mishra didn't do that – he offered to give me tuitions. I told him that I need to ask permission from my parents. He advised me not to ask them but to inform them that Mr Mishra would give me tuitions. Even today when I think of that man, I bow down because had he not been the one to teach me in Grade 5, I would have perhaps begun working as a rickshaw puller or something like that, because I would have never cleared Grade 10.

Then, another teacher I am indebted to is my Physics HOD in Degree College. Until I reached my degree college I had this air that Math and Physics are superior subjects and I felt I wouldn't be able to handle it really well. Then, I came across my HOD. What a lady she was! She was not just an amazing Physics or Math teacher, she is an amazing human being.

She has been a huge source of inspiration for me. It is from her that I understood how to teach. From her I realised that I don't have to make fighter planes for India to win wars. You need to make these amazing people for India, for India to be at its best.

My actual motivation set in from thereon.

What effective roles can teachers play in the classrooms today?

See, since 2011 I was part of the IB curriculum. After I started my IB venture, I felt like I was cheating my students until then.

Even before my IB venture, I was convinced that I was doing a great job. But, what happens in those classes? I would go to my class and teach everything! I would solve every problem in the text book. I would bombard children with every information possible, every short cut one can use, etc. I used to give away everything I knew.

But now I understand that that is not how it should be done because in the traditional method, I am only teaching you what I have learnt. That wouldn't complete the whole picture. I forget that you are learning too. I forget that there are chances that your learning can be superior to mine. In reality, children know as much as adults do.

In IB, we give students what we know and then we also give them the opportunity to explore beyond that. They may have an idea which can be superior to mine. It is like exposing them to a number of things and then giving tasks all the way through. These tasks and activities should be done in such a

way that my job becomes easier. For example, if I ask you explore around Ohm's Law, you would get the definition anyway.

So, in short, my role is to ask students to listen a bit, reflect and think a lot. I think my role has matured from merely giving lectures to being a facilitator for children to explore beyond class room teaching.

You feel more fulfilled now, right?

Totally!

When I joined IB, my HOD asked me if I could handle practical (lab classes). I agreed, of course! I mean, I have already handled practical classes for Grade 10 – 12. So, I didn't really understand why she asked. With my experience, she should have already gathered that I can do the job, right? But, I was blown when I saw their practical class' criteria.

The criteria says that teachers should not tell students the procedure or process, the instrument, table, method – nothing. We shouldn't give away any information. Students need to figure that out. We should just help them and guide them.

I was dumbstruck because that kind of methodology was alien to me – it didn't make any sense to me back then. I was a conventional student and a teacher until then. For me, practical classes meant my teacher would come and tell me the procedure, about the tables and how to take readings. For example, when in the Physics laboratory, since we knew it by heart that $G=9.8$, we would calculate backwards and manipulate the data.

From IB, I learned that we already know that $G=9.8$. We don't want to prove that again. We want students to do their experiment and tell us why they perhaps did get G as 12. They are encouraged to think, reflect and tell us why and how we arrive at $g=12$. That is when it struck me that I, as a student or even as a teacher for that matter, never sat and thought as to why would my result go wrong.

I never did a conclusion and analysis. I felt guilty that I had taught so many batches of students till date and I never exposed them to this kind of knowledge. As a teacher, I felt that was a crime and I am glad I don't commit that crime anymore.

There is quite a revolution taking place now in the education sector.

Exactly, thanks to IB! There is so much freedom to think and literally, the curriculum offers freedom to think, unlike in the traditional boards which dictate how much you should know and how much you need to understand. When traditional boards set boundaries, IB has something called extended essay. Extended essay is basically a research project, wherein the student takes up any topic and conducts a research on it. How amazing is that!

Every child across the globe must get to do such things. Children are so amazing, I tell you! The first time I did this, I was of the mind-set that this is too much. We all have a Bell curve right about categorizing children under different heads. To my surprise I realised that all children managed to do it. And, this is not just true for one of the batches. Batches after batches I see that children manage. They never do as bad as I thought they would.

Are we bound to enter into a divide when it comes to national and international curriculum?

See, every curriculum undergoes periodic reviews. A few years down the line, I feel all curriculums will become more or less the same. I see that even the State Board has made a lot of changes. They have watered down their expectations. They used to have hard core content earlier. Now, they have also included projects. Their criteria and foundation is not very detailed yet but they are definitely picking up.

I am sure, in time, different educational boards across the world will observe the world around them. All these boards consist of learned people and they would be learning and reasoning out things. Other boards are catching up – the faster they do it the better it will be. Eventually, it will all get there.

If someone who follows the national curriculum wants to switch to IB, what do you think he should keep in mind?

Of course it can't be an overnight change. There are so many aspects to be estimated. First of all, the appreciation and the mind-set from the management, teacher body and parent body are extremely important. In the IB curriculum, the middle school doesn't have exams.

In traditional boards, you have a huge exam in your 10th because after that you go to college. But, in the IB curriculum they don't have that concept. It is very difficult to convince Indian parents that it is fine not to have exams. There are a lot of fronts which need to be worked on before making the leap. Even when I got into IB, I was very reluctant on many accounts. I also had mind-sets about so many things. But then, with time, I have turned out to be a hard core believer in the IB philosophy.

If schools plan to switch over, they must start with a time frame in mind, and proper planning is required. They have to train the teachers. They have to bring in bits and pieces of the strategy in the current scenario so that small things get changed. They can use these changes as a test to see how teachers adapt around that. If they are positive towards that, then other changes can be brought about. There are orientation programs to be conducted as well to make people aware how people across the world are educating their children versus how we are doing it.

But yes, trying to change things overnight is a recipe for disaster.

Is Oberoi International School that you were working at affiliated to the IB curriculum only?

It is only affiliated to the IB curriculum now. It has Primary Year Programme (PYP), Middle Year Programme (MYP) and Diploma Course for 11th and 12th (IBDP).

Are you currently working over there?

Not really. I have put down my papers. I have got an offer from China. Soon, I will be joining an IB school in China.

How long were you part of Oberoi International School?

I worked with Oberoi for 2 years. Before that I was in Dubai for a year. I was working as the Secondary Head there. My mother fell ill and I had to come back and be here and so joined Oberoi as a Physics teacher.

Before that I was Physics teacher at another school here in Mumbai itself. That was my first IB school. Prior to that, I was teaching State Boards and other national boards.

In 2011, when I joined the IB curriculum, I learned about IB, all thanks to my mentor Ms Lalitha Venkat, my HOD at that school. She was a very learned person who was very level headed and calm.