

## In pursuit of beauty of teaching

By | Apr 14, 2015

Like all bright young engineers, Gaurav Singh too began his career as a software engineer, but soon found that his job was too mechanical. Quite by chance, an article about Bill Drayton set him on the path to social entrepreneurship. An opportunity in the form of a recruitment advertisement for Teach for India presented itself, and his journey began. While teaching some of the most marginalized children in the country, he saw numerous gaps in the education sector that needed attention. He decided to travel across India and the world learning from the best practitioners in the field before coming back to India to found the 3.2.1 Education Foundation. Over the past five years, he has spent most of his waking hours understanding teaching and learning better, as a teacher, as an observer of master teachers, and now, as a coach.

Here, in his words is his story:

### How I discovered my passion for teaching and then realized that just passion is not enough:



My inspiration to join Teach for India (TFI) came from my desire to do something for the country, not from a desire to enter the education field. However, very early on, I fell in love with the "Teach" part of Teach for India. I managed to connect the dots in my past to realize that what I had spent my school and college years really doing, was teaching.

Looking back, I think the two years at TFI helped me develop an emotional connect with my students and passion to work on the education problem in our country. The wide education gaps my students had, got me to explore the curriculum aspects of teaching. To create a safe environment to enable learning, I ventured into understanding aspects of behaviour management and classroom structures. The wish to make my students fall in love with learning and support each other on their journey motivated me to look into human motivation and culture design.

By the end of my fellowship, I think what I left my children with was a belief in their potential, a re-awakened love for learning and an improvement in their academic achievement. This gave me a lot of satisfaction but I also realized that what I hadn't got in these two years was a more thorough understanding of the art and science of teaching. After the fellowship, I knew I wanted to stay in education, but I wanted to take a more systematic approach to solving this problem. Instead of scrambling to find solutions to the problems that my students and I faced, I wanted to be more proactive. Teach for India had given me the passion and after the fellowship I went on to the next step of my journey, the founding of 3.2.1 and taking 'a year to learn'.

### Who should be in charge: Teachers or Management?

In 2011, I decided to start the 3.2.1 Education Foundation with the mission to engage with the two fundamental questions in education:

How do you help one child realize his/her potential?

How do you help every child realize their potential?

Fully aware that I didn't have a nuanced enough understanding of this, I took a year off to learn. I travelled across USA, Finland and India,

and read about the progress in the education systems of Singapore, Shanghai, South Korea, Canada, Peru, Germany and Japan. In USA, I got selected for the founding batch of a Global Fellowship with the highly regarded KIPP schools. Through it, I had the chance to study some of the most high performing schools, principals and teachers in USA and understand what was making a difference. I then went to Finland to learn from what is regarded as the best education system in the world. Through my travels in India, I tried to explore the diverse context of our nation and various approaches that educators were attempting. I also spent time studying great organizations across industries and history, and thought about how to blend all of this into the organization I wanted to build.



In 2012, 3.2.1 began its first initiative—a school in Mumbai for some of the city's poorest slum kids. At the core were two guiding principles: First, how would we build this school if we were building it for our own children? And second, how would we build this school if it were the teachers who were fully in charge? After the technology crash in 2000, the big lesson learnt was that technology companies work best when the engineers are in charge. We tried to build a similar ethos into the school, and therefore, the only sacred place in the school is the classroom, emphasizing the sacrosanct relationship between the teacher and the student. Through an innovative staffing model and a heavy focus on peer support and mentoring, we have managed to maintain teaching as the highest aspiration in the school. Everyone is a teacher and most of our time is spent understanding teaching and learning better.

I have seen some amazing teachers and I know that the amazing feats they perform don't come from the mysteries of the unknown, but simply from an honest pursuit of the art and science of their profession.

Ultimately, my hope for our teachers is that they will bring together the virtues of the now forgotten craftsmen and the presently admired professional. Craftsmen, for their pursuit of beauty in their work, complete devotion to their craft and their desire to create something incredible. The modern professional, for the use of research and data, authentic collaboration and a deep desire to constantly improve.

### **What will the teachers of the future be like?**

The technology brigade keeps warning us that teachers are going to disappear and be replaced by devices and algorithms. I humbly disagree with my tech-loving brothers and sisters. The more I understand learning, especially from a neuro-scientific point of view, the more I realize that learning, communication and relationships are strongly intertwined in our brains. In fact, to a large extent we developed the abilities to communicate, read, write, create music and build cultures, all because we wanted to create more symbiotic and productive relationships. From Raj Chetty's work about the role of a kindergarten teacher to Gallup's 2014 study on the link between a successful post college life and presence of inspiring college professors, research constantly tells us that teachers matter, a lot!



In saying that, I am no Luddite. On the contrary, I spend a significant amount of my free time exploring modern day technology and dreaming about the future it promises. I believe that to understand what role technology will play in education, instead of looking at the future, we need to look at the past and learn from another profession which is highly regarded in society - the medical profession. The transformation of the medical profession in the last 100 odd years has been nothing short of extraordinary. It has gone from competing with quacks and witch doctors to now being heralded as the miracle profession.

As I understand, there were three big changes which led to this transformation. First, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, doctors started holding themselves to the very high and exacting standards of a scientist. This trend started largely in Germany and then over the course of a few decades spread to most of the developed and developing world. Secondly, due to this, the role of the medical professional split into two - the specialist and the caregiver, or the doctor and the nurse. This fuelled a rapid phase of research, discovery and specialization in the medical profession while also ensuring that on a day-to-day basis, patients were given the care they needed. Finally, the third big change was the arrival of more advanced tools which were better medicines and sophisticated equipment for diagnosis, treatment and care. I believe a similar shift is required in the education profession. We need some educators to become more specialized, others to ensure that on a daily basis children get the care, love and attention they need to become holistic individuals, and we need better tools. The third category is where I see technology's massive role: in providing better tools for learning diagnosis, student support, information management and data processing. Lastly, we need a stronger link between research and implementation and we need to hold ourselves to a higher standard than anybody else holds our profession.

Ultimately, I think the teacher of the future will be an amalgamation between the now forgotten craftsmen and the modern day professional.

*This article, by Gaurav Singh, was published in the July 2014 issue of Teacher Plus.*

**Tags:** teach  
inspire  
passion  
entrepreneur  
future

---

**Source URL:** <http://teachersofindia.org/en/spotlight/pursuit-beauty-teaching>