Teaching and beyond: exploring the educational landscape

Teaching offers a range of experience that provides a foundation for subsequent roles in the education sector. Anaghaa Wagh shares her personal journey.
Teaching, for me, was an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children who needed it the most. It was not only a window into the everyday life of a teacher, but also a window into the lives of my students, their surroundings, and the education system. The challenges were many, but so were the opportunities to learn and expand my horizons, and hopefully to make a positive impact.

What started as a volunteering stint during my gap year while preparing for competitive MBA entrance exams, became my ultimate career choice. I vividly remember the first day of walking into the classroom after joining Teach For India as a volunteer. I felt an instant connection and a sense of belonging! Towards the end of my volunteering period, I was in an internal dilemma – I had to choose between a career in management and continue teaching on a volunteering basis or make a career switch altogether. The deciding moment arrived during an event I helped to organise as a volunteer; I realised that teaching was much more appealing and fulfilling for me. I applied for the Teach For India Fellowship and began the most adventurous and eye-opening journey that shaped my life.

Upon finishing the five-week at the training institute, I was placed in a government school in Pune to teach grade 4 students. As a Fellow, the primary goal I set for myself was to become the best teacher for my students. However, this goal transformed when an opportunity to become a school team leader arose. It was a new role with few specifications but I decided to take the leap; the deciding moment arrived during an event I helped to organise as a volunteer; I realised that teaching was much more appealing and fulfilling for me. I applied for the Teach For India Fellowship and began the most adventurous and eye-opening journey that shaped my life.

As the academic year crossed its halfway mark, Fellows were encouraged to take up an internship during the summer holidays at school. Going back to the Training Institute, I remember watching videos of teachers from around the world as examples of good teaching and leadership practice.

This sparked my interest in exploring ‘teaching as leadership’ in an international context. Fascinated by the Scandinavian model of education, I found an internship at Futuraskolan International in Sweden. I observed classes, interviewed and shadowed teachers, school leaders, and interacted with students and parents. I came back with many strong professional relationships and learnings for my class and implemented them straightaway. For example, a dedicated period every week to teach arts and physical education. In India, the burden of teaching main curriculum subjects in the short school year and an even shorter school day meant that these two subjects did not get much attention and weren’t as meaningful to the students as they could be. Following their practice at Futuraskolan, I incorporated easy-to-do art projects by famous artists along with short biographies on them. To make it relevant, the lessons had questions such as ‘what values do you think the artist displayed in their life?’, ‘what did you learn from them?’ etc. For physical education, I focused on healthy eating habits along with exercises, indoor and outdoor games.
The value of extra-curricular activities was imprinted on me from the volunteering days. In the final year of the Fellowship, I took on the responsibility of leading the Model United Nations programme for all Teach For India schools in Pune city. The principal idea was not to hold an event, but rather to build a sustainable platform for students to gain knowledge about the world and practice oratory and debate skills. As a team of 20 people, we succeeded in making this possible and the programme is now in its fourth successful year.

The sum of this experience whetted my appetite to explore education, especially educational leadership and school improvement, through research. Along with studying for a postgraduate degree in Education Management, I started to work as a teaching assistant in primary and secondary schools in London. Though I spotted many differences between schools in India and the UK, I noted common challenges too – the attainment gap between low and high-income students, scarcity of funds, shortage of teachers, etc. While these challenges still stand strong, a greater focus on educational research in the UK aids to overcome them. With organisations like the Education Endowment Foundation running research trials all throughout the year, schools have the opportunity to participate in those trials and benefit from the evidence-based interventions.

The experience of teaching, and working with students and parents in partnership has been the anchor in my exploration of the education sector and a helpful resource to draw from at every turn. I found that one’s teaching experience adds more value to any role they might take up in the education sector. A teacher’s point of view is by and large in demand, and it gives an additional advantage. Personally, being a teacher has humbled me and made me a reflective person. Although I couldn’t have envisaged the exact path my career would take when I first started teaching, the journey so far has been a wonderful learning experience. I am determined to keep on exploring the wonderful world of education.

NOTES

1Teach For India is a non-profit organisation that is a part of the Teach For All network. The Fellowship recruits college graduates and working professionals to serve as full-time teachers in low-income schools for two years (Wikipedia). https://apply.teachforindia.org

2Maharashtra State Council for Educational Research and Training is the apex academic institute of the state. Its function is to provide academic support and help improve the quality of primary education.

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REFERENCES


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