

Teachaclass.org: India's First Funding Platform for Teachers

Sneha Menon 02 June 2018

We all have that one teacher who changed our lives. The memory of struggling with a problem and finally understanding how to solve it when explained, or being inspired by a poem read aloud by your teacher is a collective one. Teachers impact lives. Great teachers even more so.

India has more than 9.7 million teachers across more than 8.3 million schools. Nearly half of these are low-income schools, where teachers are paid salaries as low as 5,000 to 15,000 rupees a month (USD 75-230). Even in government-run or high-end private schools, salaries rarely go above 20,000 to 40,000 rupees (USD 300-600) (Gray Matters Capital).¹ In these circumstances, motivated teachers often end up spending their own money to bring learning resources to their classes. Even if a teacher is motivated enough to contribute to classroom resources from her own salary, many face a lack of respect and support from their communities. "Teaching is seen as a second-class job for those who don't do well enough academically to enter more prestigious careers, such as medicine or engineering." says Maya Menon,

founder of the Teacher Foundation (Ullasi, Sruthy Susan-Times of India, 2014)². Offering better salaries could get more people interested, however she goes on to state that, "being a woman-dominated profession, it's perceived as not being demanding but requires as much planning, preparation, and rigor as any other job. The overarching problem is the low status of the teaching profession. Our teachers aren't empowered to think creatively and out of the box."



Abhijeet, a school academic manager, works with Priyanka, a student from the Gurnanak School in Mumbai.

Photo Credit: Neil D'Souza

The Need for Motivated Teachers

Teachers are the biggest influencers of a child's education but face tremendous difficulties because of the lack of

motivation and support they encounter. A body of literature highlights teacher motivation as critical for student learning outcomes. Baeza, Chesterfield, and Moreno find that teacher attitude is the dominant factor explaining teacher and school performance in their evaluation of a USAID basic education project in Guatemala (Mendez 2011). This reflects similar findings among assessments of the Escuela Nueva model in Colombia and Guatemala (Colbert and Mogollon, 1977; Schiefelbein, 1991; and Kraft, 1998). In East Africa, Anderson (2001) reports that teacher motivation was a key factor in Agha Khan Foundation teacher training programs. Using case studies of 12 African and South Asian countries, Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) pinpoint the commitment of teachers as one of the most important determinants of learning outcomes. Thus, in a variety of developing countries, high teacher motivation leads to positive educational outcomes (Jarret Guajardo-Save the Children Basic Education Intern)³. Providing active support and an enabling culture for the professional development of our eight million teachers is perhaps the most urgent intervention required to improve the quality of education in India (Behar)⁴. Under a government teacher's terms of employment, no monetary incentives are provided to high performing teachers. With very low operating budgets, affordable low-cost private schools have even more restrictions in terms of incentive budgets for acknowledging and appreciating the work of these teachers.

While motivated teachers are constantly seeking avenues to help in professional development there are almost no systems in a low-income school to motivate, encourage, upskill, and retain such teachers. Most continue to struggle with the limited resources available to them or lose their enthusiasm.

Teach A Class Foundation (TAC), is an education-focused non-profit organization which aims to empower motivated teachers by recognizing and rewarding their work. On a quiet Children's Day morning in 2017, we launched teachaclass.org, India's first funding platform for teachers. This first-of-its-kind platform was built in response to the need of aspirational teachers across India, who wish to bring modern learning tools to their classrooms, but lack the means to do so. "Working in India's low-cost education sector, I came across numerous inspiring teachers, who wanted to make a difference to the children in their care. I found that such teachers take the time and effort to introduce innovative learning experiences in their classrooms. But the biggest limiting factor for them was having the access to funds to try something new." says Neil D'Souza, Founder of the Teach A Class Foundation.



Motivated teachers take the time and effort to introduce innovative learning experiences into their classrooms.

Here, a teacher at the New Brilliant School in Hyderabad uses a tablet to explain concepts to her class.

Photo credit: Betty John

Our Journey

Teach A Class first began in 2012, after our founder, Neil D'Souza took a sabbatical in Mongolia. Then a Silicon Valley engineer, Neil was moved by the lack of access to modern learning resources in motivated schools and orphanages. This led him to build the ClassCloud, a personalized learning platform that enables teachers to access digital content in places with no internet. The

desire to bring this solution to those who most needed it led to TAC being set up in San Francisco, and then in India in 2013.

TAC's current mission is to empower teachers to fulfill their classroom ambitions and dreams for their students, by giving them access to innovative tools and solutions that have a proven efficacy record. Neil, through his experience fundraising, knew first-hand that people are eager to donate money to education, but often can't find the right cause, or are unsure that the funds will be utilized as intended. TAC connects motivated teachers to a broader community of donors and companies who want to fund specific classroom interventions.

Neil was inspired to create TAC by donorschoose.org, a platform in the U.S. that connects public school teachers with requests for their classrooms to donors. Teach A Class however, takes this a step further -- not only raising funds for classrooms but also working with teachers across the country to ensure that tools are understood and used.

We discovered early on that the success of any education initiative depends to a very high degree on the motivation of teachers and school leaders. This has inspired TAC's decision to work with teachers and school leaders who are already committed to bringing innovation into their classrooms. Donors also remain assured that the tools they fund are actively sought after, rather than a model

which floods schools with multimedia and hardware that they have no inclination or desire to use.



Through its funding platform, Teach A Class is able to support teachers with innovate tools like Zaya's ClassCloud. Here a student at the Gurunanak School in Mumbai uses a tablet to access the personalized learning platform.

Photo Credit: Neil D'Souza

How Does the Platform Work?

- Interested teachers visit teachaclass.org and choose a tool they feel is most useful from a list of pre-selected education tools available on the site (currently there are only two tools available on the platform but we are working on adding more soon).

- Teachers are then asked to write a short story about why their class deserves this intervention and how they intend to use it.
- TAC then works with teachers to help articulate their story and post it on our website.
- Donors who visit the site can pick from any of these campaigns and donate any amount they choose to classrooms.
- After performing its due diligence, TAC procures and implements the tools for the teachers, and sets up a monitoring and evaluation system in the school to track progress.
- The M&E system ensures that donors receive regular updates on the usage of the tools they have contributed towards, and helps the teachers provide evidence of their success.
- We also encourage schools to raise funds for themselves and a few have succeeded in raising small amounts

How Do We Raise Funds for Teachers?

- **Donations:** We receive most of our funding from companies and individuals through their CSR (corporate social responsibility) funds or individual donations. Our current focus is on raising funds through CSR as the quantum of funding needed is larger during the initial stages. All funds go directly to the projects listed on our platform. Donors can

choose to give to schools of their preference or as recommended by our algorithms.

- **Voluntary Fundraising:** We also aim to reach out to motivated individuals who are keen to not only donate themselves, but also help raise funds for schools and teachers that they connect with.

Data-driven Empowerment

A key focus of Teach A Class is to ensure that our interventions make an impact. To this end the platform is heavily invested in monitoring and evaluating the efficacy of the tools we provide. Apart from pre-selecting tools that have a proven track record, we also aim to monitor usage and the learning outcomes of children in schools. Once we reach a critical mass with a diverse range of tools offered on the platform, this will enable us to develop a comparative understanding of available learning solutions and what really works, ultimately impacting the learner. In five years, we envision teachaclass.org will be a platform for policy and decision makers from governments and corporations. They will be able to see exactly how well different tools work in different parts of the country and where specific interventions may be needed.

Where We Are Now

In the six months since we re-launched teachaclass.org, we have already received a capacity building grant from

Fidelity International to help us build a robust monitoring and evaluation platform. As part of this grant, we initiated a 100-school project, which will fund schools across India, collate data on the efficacy of the tools we offer, and help us build our monitoring and evaluation system to provide donors with dashboards and analytics on how their donations are impacting teachers and students.

We're currently on a mission to connect 50,000 teachers and 50 million students to donors in the next five years. So far, we have successfully funded six projects through individual donors and 100 through grant. There are currently 30 campaigns listed on our site with a pipeline of 450 schools that will go live once these listed campaigns are funded. We are also engaged with the CSR departments of a number of Indian companies who are keen to support schools in the neighborhood of their factories across the country.

With this small but significant start TAC is hoping to reach all the deserving teachers in low-income schools in India.

About Teach A Class Foundation

Established in 2012, Teach A Class Foundation is a 25c non-profit with 80g certification. It is an education-focused non-profit whose mission is to empower teachers to fulfill their classroom ambitions and dreams for their students, by introducing innovative tools and solutions that have a proven efficacy record.

Author bio

Sneha Menon, is the Director of Growth at Teach A Class Foundation. Through her efforts, inspirational teachers across India are able to bring technology and implementation into the classroom. Sneha works with Corporate Social Responsibility arms of Indian corporations, as well as education NGOs across India to find common purpose.

Works Cited

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