

inspirED 2020

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01. A Case for the Integration of Art in our Schools
02. School Leadership Recruitment and Training
03. Working with Parents as Co Educators
04. Building 21st century skills and Leadership in students
05. Empowering Teachers through Teacher Development Program: Recommendations for National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education

06. Cultivating Teacher Growth

07. Blended Learning Practices
08. Repurposing Curriculum and Assessments for deep learning
09. National education policy and early childhood education - connecting intent to implementation
10. Enabling young adults to lead their journey towards employability through evidence based review
11. NEP Priority: Child Safety and Well Being
12. Teacher Career Growth





Cultivating Teacher Growth



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5.10.2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Personalised Cycle of Coaching
 - a. Case Study: Classroom Walkthrough
 - b. Process of Coaching
 - c. Fundamental Features of Coaching
3. Supportive Ecosystem
 - a. Case Study : Ecosystem of support
 - b. Exploring Motivation
4. Conditions for learning and growth
5. Concluding Remarks
6. References

INTRODUCTION

As we navigate and seek direction in uncertain times, educators must pause and step back to examine their role in empowering children for this ever changing world. The National Education Policy of 2020 states that “education must not only develop cognitive capacities but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions” (p. 4).

For our students to embody a complete education, one that is centered on nurturing social emotional development and cognitive capacity, it is essential for our teachers to enable our students to realize, cultivate and nurture these skills and dispositions.

“The effects of high-quality teaching are especially significant for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds: over a school year, these pupils gain 1.5 years worth of learning with very effective teachers, compared with 0.5 years with poorly performing teachers. In other words, for poor pupils the difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher is a whole year’s learning.” (The Sutton Trust, 2011, p. 2). For students from under resourced schools, it is imperative to bridge the learning gap and ensure all students get the additional socio-emotional support they need. In an increasingly divisive world where pandemics and lockdowns are a harsh reality, teachers have come together for our most vulnerable students. Now more than ever, teacher growth and quality needs to be a core focus for every school so that our educators, children and families can thrive.

In this paper we explore how we might begin to develop the capacities and dispositions as outlined by the NEP in our teachers. A focus on learning and self awareness, cycles of support and coaching and a school ecosystem that celebrates and recognises teachers, are critical focus areas outlined for educator development.

PERSONALISED CYCLE OF COACHING

SEEMA MA’AM : CLASSROOM WALKTHROUGH

As we enter a small classroom in a government school in New Delhi, Seema ma’am is teaching her students the concept of perimeter, with the children huddled in groups, using thread to measure the length of their benches. They are asking questions, brimming with intense discussion and gleaming with pride as they finally understand the concept.

This wasn’t always the case in Seema Ma’am’s class as she taught grade 4 students at SDMC Primary Girls Pushp Vihar Government School. Initially, when we started working with Seema ma’am, her execution was solely focused on her explaining the content using the board, asking the same set of students to share their answers and ended with her informing them about the next set of assignments, assuming that this way of teaching worked for all her students.

Today, her classroom has evolved into a joyful and meaningful learning space, especially with her investment and experience with personalised coaching. With the help of model lessons by her coach, multiple and regular coaching conversations using qualitative and quantitative data from her classroom, she has explored and internalised the process of breaking-down concepts. This has helped Seema Ma'am use real life examples along with concrete objects to build on student understanding and ensure that all her plans enable every child to actively participate in their own learning.

Every week, Seema Ma'am and her coach brainstorm on the objectives, lesson plans and activities that she has designed for the week, constantly aligning them with her quarterly and yearly goals. Once she begins with her classroom instruction, her coach joins her classroom for an observation, taking anecdotal notes, observing her facilitation and gauging student learning. Post the observation, they spend some time debriefing the lesson, with the coach praising ma'am on specific actions and sharing its impact on student growth and learning. They then move into identifying areas of improvement, where the coach and teacher mutually agree on one key area to work on along with clear action steps. The goal of the coach is to create a safe space for the teacher to further ask questions, brainstorm on ideas that will enable deep learning in the classroom and practice skills, before finalising next steps that they both hold each other accountable to.

This process is repeated on a weekly basis, giving Seema ma'am the opportunity to hone her skills and actively lead her own development, with the support of her coach.

THE COACHING PROCESS

More often than not, when we think of learning and development for teachers, myriads of daylong seminars and workshops come to mind, where tips and tricks for improving instructional quality in the classroom are shared across schools. Despite the high frequency, the seminars and workshop form of professional development have shown "to have little or no effect on teacher quality" (Kraft & Blazar, 2018, para. 2). The need for personalised coaching, which follows a learner-centered approach to professional development, has intensified with the exploration and evolution of teacher and teaching quality.

Cornett and Knight (2009) found in a study of 50 teachers that those who had coaching along with an introductory workshop were significantly more likely to use the new teaching practice in their classes, than those who only were only exposed to the workshop.

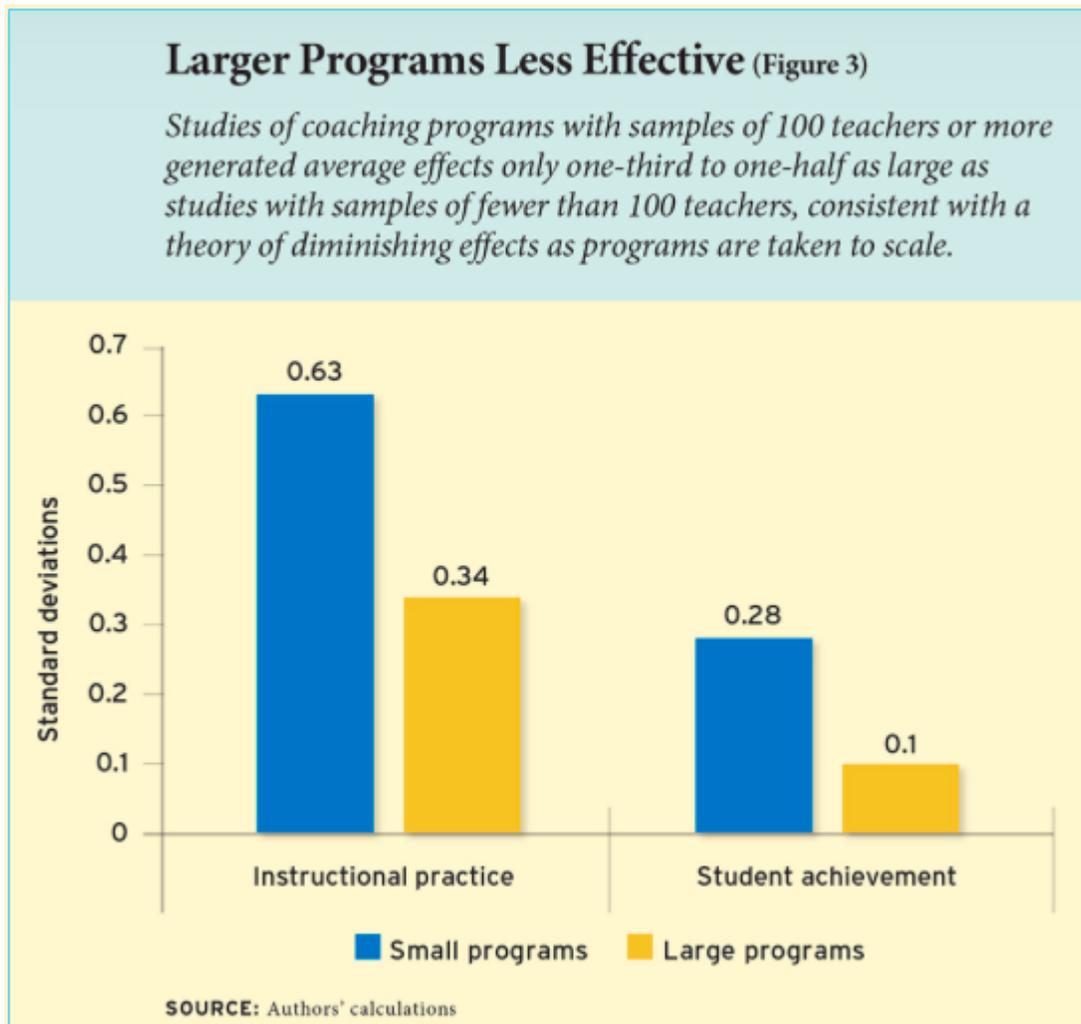


Figure 1: Large Programs Less Effective. Adapted from "Taking teacher coaching to scale", by M.A. Kraft and D. Blazar, 2018, Education Next. Copyright by Education Next.

As we can see from the graph above, personalised coaching empowers the teachers to take ownership of their goals, with the coaches taking on the supportive role, providing them with consistent and individualized feedback, addressing specific areas of improvement (Lisciandrello, n.d.).

Before we delve deeper into understanding the fundamental features of coaching, it is essential to first explore and align with the process and purpose of the coaching cycle.

The process of coaching is rooted in the awareness that teachers develop when they are consistently supported with regular observations, provided with constructive and focused feedback, and given ample opportunities to practice their skill, constantly striving to improve the student learning process in their classrooms (Bambrick-Santoyo, Peiser & Lemov, 2012).

Simple Education Foundation, 321 Education Foundation and iTeach Schools have committed themselves to enabling and empowering their teachers with learner-centered and personalised

coaching. Across all the three organizations, coaching is provided on a consistent and frequent basis taking into account student and teacher needs, encompassing observations and debriefs, with feedback that precisely praises the teacher's actions. Along with positive feedback loops, it is imperative to brainstorm together on a key focus area with the teacher to improve their practice. The most crucial factor for the coach is to guide and provide space for the teacher to practice the skill and follow-up by continued rounds of the observation-feedback cycle.

FUNDAMENTAL FEATURES OF COACHING

Alignment with the process of personalised instructional coaching is the starting point to teacher growth. Along with the process, consistent implementation of the essential features of the coaching cycle is equally important to design effective educator support.

1. While planning for inputs and improving skills on a continuous basis is important for all teachers, it is equally necessary to pay ample attention to student learning, as effective instruction is really about whether the students are learning what is being taught. **Coaching conversations focused on data-driven instruction** ensure that planning and feedback is grounded in reality rather than assumptions, and that all students and their learning levels are accounted for in instruction. When thinking of student data, teachers must be able to access multiple sources that will inform their classroom strategies and needs of students. The coach must move beyond summative assessments and support the teacher with analysing more relevant information that helps the teacher reflect, replan and provide focused instruction in the classroom. "Classroom observations and discussions with students often help pinpoint areas of concern. Interviews with teachers, focus groups, or discussions in professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004) are especially valuable." (Guskey, 2017, p. 34-35).

iTeach School's model of one on one coaching emphasizes on the importance of data focused conversations, where the goals for a year are planned for first, the units are designed following backward planning and brings in formative assessments to inform progress, tweaks to plans and overall instruction.

2. One of the most critical and often overlooked element of the coaching cycle is that of practice. Most observation and debrief conversations focus on the identification of areas of growth and action steps, which puts the burden of implementation on the teacher alone. **It is crucial to ensure that teachers get to practice the skill** through role plays or improving on their lesson plan, during the observation-debrief cycle. Practice, practice and more practice empowers the teacher to bring the skill back to her/his classroom. Malcolm Gladwell, the author of *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2008), calculates that it takes 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to master a complex skill, where practice facilitates continuous improvement, thereby roughly translating into about "seven years for those working in schools" (Aguilar, 2013, para. 1). In Figure 2 below

we can see how an assessment of teacher development programs run in 8 African regions by RTI International showed how the most successful programs had a marked difference in time dedicated to modelling and practicing taught skills. The choices were very different from programs that had not shown successful results where a lot of time went to discussion instead.

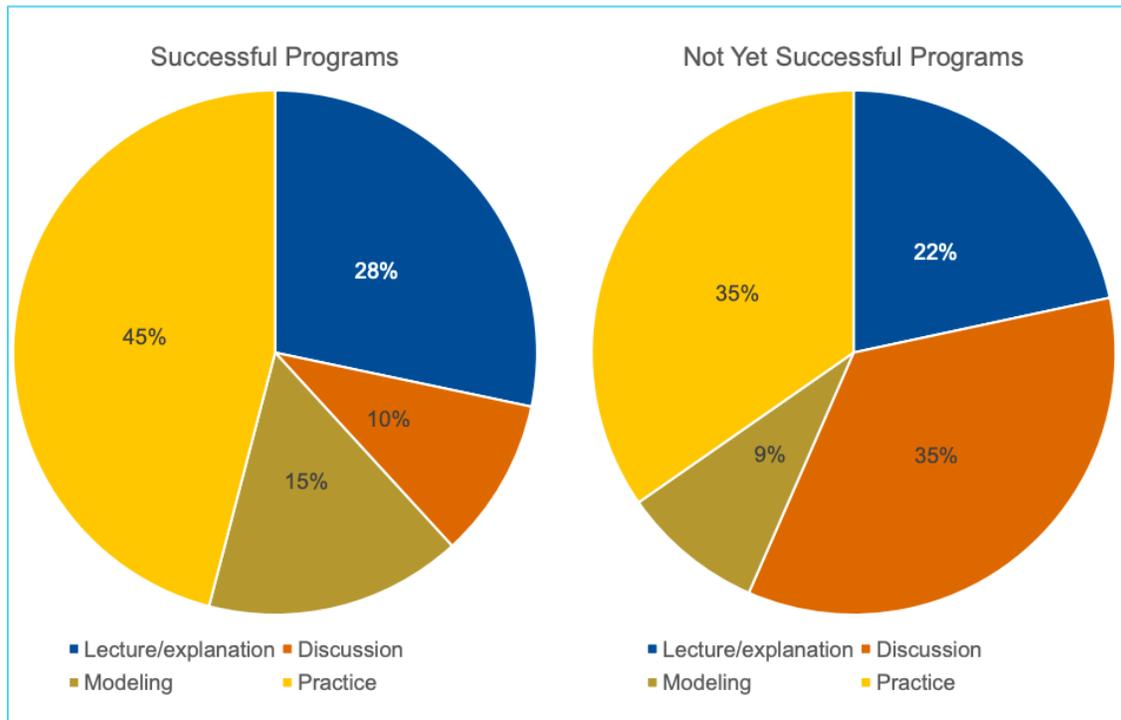


Figure 2: Piper, B. (2019) Improving instruction at scale: How to help teachers improve their daily practice [Powerpoint Presentation]. Global Schools Forum, Kenya

Simple Education Foundation’s model of instructional coaching has been inspired by these findings and places deliberate emphasis on practice and rehearsals, providing the teachers with ample opportunities to ask questions, integrate feedback and improvise on their skills before conducting lessons.

3. **Consistency is one of the key features of the coaching cycle**, which ensures that teachers are regularly observed and receive frequent feedback, along with getting multiple opportunities to practice (Bambrick-Santoyo, Peiser & Lemov, 2012). In a qualitative study focusing on the effects of consistent observation and feedback on teacher practice and motivation, Nasatir (2016) shares that the data suggested that “A deeper thinking and understanding of practice emerged from the abundance of professional dialogue that existed during the feedback sessions” (p. 59). Teachers shared that along with experiencing improvement in their practice, consistency in coaching helped them actively see their own progress, which in turn acted as a great motivator for them to continue to improve.

321 Education Foundation has constantly strived to maintain consistency within their structures and coaching model, creating a balanced mix of in-person and online coaching to facilitate learning for teachers on a regular basis along with building a safe space for dialogue, which has improved the overall effectiveness of the teacher's teaching quality.

Personalised teacher coaching is one of the strongest practices in educator professional development that motivates and invests teachers to nurture a thriving learning environment for their students. This learning environment flourishes in schools that encourage and celebrate progress through authentic and meaningful experiences.

SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM: EXPLORING MOTIVATION

A SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM

Let's go back to Seema Ma'am's school. As a government teacher solely responsible for grade 4 students, Seema Ma'am has multiple other responsibilities. Along with the core responsibilities within the classroom, learning and improving her practice consistently, she is also expected to fulfill additional duties including data collection, administration tasks, mid-day meals distribution etc. This can get complex and challenging for any teacher. However, Seema Ma'am continues to have the focus and motivation to improve and grow despite her challenging context. What then keeps teachers like her motivated and committed to serve all children despite the odds?

Every morning and evening, her school team comes together to share shoutouts for each other. Seema Ma'am is praised by her Principal Lajwanti Ma'am for conducting a well-structured phonics lesson.

In another classroom, Kanchan Ma'am is spending time developing the Hindi phonics assessment which will be presented to the Delhi government officials in a few weeks. She feels pride at being able to contribute meaningfully and use her unique strengths to help other teachers and students.

Last year, during the certification ceremony held by her school, Mukta Ma'am received the certificate of excellence for consistently building her skills which led to a significant growth in her performance and student outcomes. Her school team was present at the ceremony. Seeing them take pride in her growth and cheering for her gave her deep joy and satisfaction. She felt proud to be a part of the teaching community.

We discover that all the teachers draw their strength from their peers, leaders and their community which is collaborative and appreciative of each other's efforts.

EXPLORING TEACHER MOTIVATION

Motivation is key to a successful classroom whether it is a class full of primary school children or teachers

across different schools. When teachers are motivated they will be able to foster a collaborative culture and a conducive environment in their classrooms thereby positively impacting the students' outcomes. In this section, we will explore three key areas from our experience that are important in motivating teachers:

1. **Recognising and celebrating teacher effort** is critical to sustain motivation. In a 2014 survey of about 300 new teachers and 120 senior teachers/principals, a vast majority responded that, in addition to the satisfaction of seeing their students learn and grow (which is, of course, a natural incentive for teaching), they are keen to see: (1) merit-based career opportunities; (2) financial rewards; (3) public recognition. (Centre for Civil Society, 2018) However, according to Gallup research, "only 29% of teachers strongly agree with the statement, 'In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.'" (Hodges, 2017, para 3).

Studies show that recognizing teachers for great work actually helps make them more engaged, productive teachers which improves their performance (Hodges, 2017). Great teachers who are regularly recognized for their work intend to continue teaching twice as long as those who don't (TNTP, 2012). It is important to note that the recognition should be linked to their efforts and growth as opposed to their talents or personalities. It's also critical to appreciate not just effort but learning and progress, and to emphasize what yields these things, such as seeking help from others, trying new strategies, and capitalizing on setbacks to move forward effectively (Dweck, 2016).

Some interventions by various programs are outlined in this section: iTeach school teams come together for morning and evening huddles. Huddles generally contain a shout outs section where teachers praise each other for their contributions and actions. Bhavya Malhotra, a grade 10 Math teacher at iTeach SVT, says *"School Team Meetings and huddles create a sense of togetherness within the team. Appreciation here makes me feel motivated and inspired. It feels like home where people are honest and appreciative of your work."*

321 Education Foundation hosts celebration events with the schools every few months where the school community comes together to recognise each other's work and celebrate individual and collective progress. In the final event held in the academic year 2019-20, 96.89% teachers across Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad gave a rating of 4+(on a scale of 5) sharing that they felt celebrated and recognised for their efforts.

Simple Education foundation regularly runs social media campaigns sharing teacher stories and celebrating their efforts with the community and in their schools. These stories specifically highlight the perseverance, grit and growth demonstrated by the teachers within and outside school.

2. **Making teaching valued and aspirational** will help teachers take pride in their profession and stay motivated. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, "The perception of teaching as a low status profession can adversely impact recruitment and retention" (p. 4). Improving the status of teaching improves not only motivation but also performance and student outcomes (UNESCO, 2012).

When teachers feel that their work matters and there is prestige associated with the work they do, they are more willing to overcome challenges along the journey. To this end, 321 Education foundation certifies their teachers at the end of their program. The aim of certification is to define excellence in teaching and motivate educators towards that excellence. The certificate is provided based on their performance in the program thereby making their jobs aspirational and valued. Salma Bi, a grade 3 teacher from Vishal English School shared *"I have fun while teaching, I have become more confident, sincere and hardworking. Certification also helps me strive to do better and improve my practice."*



Pictured above: Teachers receiving their end of year certificates. Copyright by 321 Education Foundation

iTeach Schools organise exposure visits for all the staff members to learn from excellent schools and drive aspiration amongst teachers. The organization believes that this practice encourages a sense of possibility and enables peer learning. Teachers pick up relevant and creative strategies to apply into their own classrooms. For exposure visits iTeach runs a program called schools to learn from (STLF) for their teachers. In 2019, 22 teachers from iTeach visited 2 Mumbai schools as a part of this program. At the end of the trip, 92% teachers said that they had important and applicable takeaways from the visit and 100% teachers articulated that the STLF visit increased their sense of possibility.

3. **Providing opportunities for teachers to leverage their unique strengths and contribute meaningfully to their school and community** leads to teachers feeling motivated and willing to give their best. It's crucial to understand that as humans we want to feel motivated and to find meaning in the things that we do. It's part of our biology. There's a part of our brains called the seeking system that creates the natural impulses to learn new skills and take on challenging but meaningful tasks. When our seeking systems are activated, we feel more motivated, purposeful, and zestful (Cable, 2018). We feel a sense of purpose when we can experience firsthand how our unique contributions help other people and allow the team to progress which in turn leads to a rise in our motivation levels. In the figure below we can see how appreciation, purpose, opportunity are essential aspects of workplace culture leading to high engagement.



Figure 3: OC Tanner Institute. (2018) Global Culture Report.

Simple Education Foundation leverages the unique knowledge and skills of the government teachers they work with to co-create their curriculum. Kanchan ma'am from SDMC Bhim Nagri school collaborated with Simple Education Foundation to design first of its kind Hindi phonics assessment, that helped all the teachers in her own school as well as other SEF schools, to identify fluency levels of their students along with areas that students were struggling with. Chandni Chopra from Simple Education Foundation shares, *"Our teachers have a unique set of skills waiting to be leveraged. When we value their inputs, believe in their capabilities and highlight them not only within school but with external government officials, we change the narrative around how their jobs and abilities are perceived."*



Pictured above : Kanchan Ma'am and Pravina from SEF in their assessment debriefs and weekly planning meeting. Copyright by Simple Education Foundation.

Teacher motivation is complex and highly driven by context. What may work in one setting might not be effective in another. There is no one size fits all. But there's no denying the integral link between motivation and performance. When teachers feel motivated and excited about their work, it has a direct impact in the classroom.

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING AND GROWTH

ENABLING CONDITIONS

1. **Committed leadership team:** To foster a culture of high-quality instructional leadership and motivation for teachers, a strong leadership team is imperative, consisting of skilled and passionate leaders and coaches (Bambrick-Santoyo, Peiser & Lemov, 2012). Implementation of practices involves a mindset shift for all stakeholders, where each individual takes ownership of their growth and actively contributes to the development of their peers. To enable such a shift, the leaders and coaches need to continually hone their ability to guide and empower their teaching community.
2. **Alignment of purpose and priorities:** Successful implementation and execution of any intervention or practice necessitates an alignment of purpose within the school and organisation, along with that of its systems. The core vision of the school is one that all teachers must understand and embrace as their own, upholding it as they plan and design for student learning. Teacher development needs to be aligned to a set of clear school priorities, fostering a sense of

willingness for teachers to adapt their practice in service of the school's vision and mission (Kraft and Blazar, 2018).

3. **Integrating with school schedule:** The interventions described above will be effective when they are intentionally and consistently planned for and added to the structures, rather than discussed at the surface level (Bambrick-Santoyo, Peiser & Lemov, 2012). For example, the coaching cycle should be added to the timetable of the coaches and teachers, on a monthly and quarterly basis, to ensure intentionality and consistency in practice, effectively closing the learning loops.

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. **Size and type of the program:** As highlighted in Figure 1 (Kraft and Blazar, 2018) programs must consider the impact of coaching on instructional quality when scaling. Strategic use of technology, consistent checkpoints through the year and investing in relationships and culture can mitigate some of the challenges that larger programs face. Other considerations for design will be based on the program flexibility and funding.
2. **Cultural Responsiveness:** Testing and literature of the practices mentioned is relatively limited outside high income countries. Context of the country, region and state will play a pivotal role in selecting practices especially with regards to teacher motivation. Though the principles behind these interventions remain the same, directly applying a standard approach to motivation or coaching without teacher voice and ownership in the process will not be successful.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A comprehensive coaching philosophy and celebration of teachers as pioneers of change sows the seeds for a transformational school. This paper presents an invitation to unleash the potential of our educators by laying a strong foundation for teacher development. As we continue to reimagine learning and teaching in our education system, cultivating teacher growth needs be prioritised to make our vision for children a reality.

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