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TEACHER CHATTER

Neeraja Raghavan and Vineeta Sood

‘Hey dude!’ rang a familiar voice across the crowded lobby of the five star hotel.

Praveen turned around to find his former colleague, Sumit walking up to him with a beaming smile on his face. Looking dapper in a grey suit and tie, he shook Praveen’s hand as he asked: ‘What are YOU doing here? Thought you’d quit the company?’

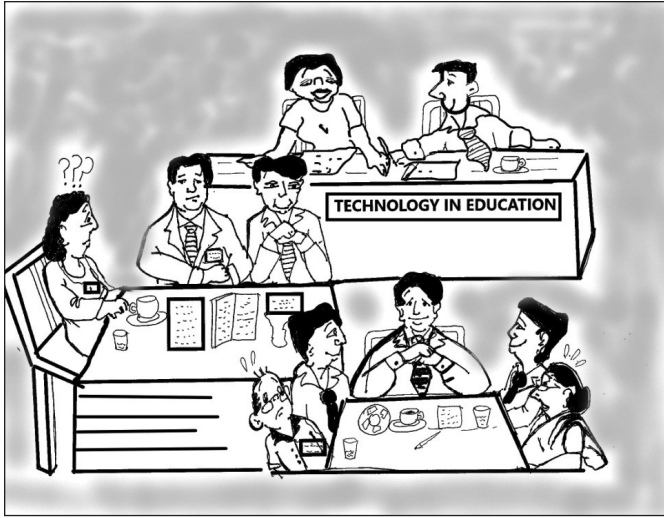
Praveen pointed to his name-tag with a grin: ‘I represent the folks you now serve, Sumit!’ he replied. ‘After all, a conference on “Technology in School Education” should have a teacher too, right?’

Sumit laughed as he helped himself to a cup of coffee. Munching biscuits, the two friends stepped away from the coffee counter and continued chatting.

‘Who leaves a well-paying job in a multinational company to become a teacher?’ Sumit asked, nudging Praveen. ‘I mean, come on, *yaar!* Like, don’t you need a real job?’

Praveen stopped and stared at his friend. ‘What do you mean “real job”? I *am* in a “real job”! I teach children, children of varying ages and capabilities, five days a week and let me tell you: it’s hard work!’

Throwing his head back, Sumit laughed uproariously. ‘Are you seriously trying to tell me that teaching a bunch of school children is as hard as spending all your waking hours writing countless lines of code, dealing with cranky clients, chasing unrealistic deadlines ... not to mention, documenting every single little thing like it was God’s given word. Get real, man! And what do you get paid, anyway?’



Before Praveen could respond, the next session was announced. Settling down again in the conference room, he was visibly troubled as Sumit's words rang in his ears.

He had been so excited when his Principal had asked him to attend a conference on 'Technology in School Education'. As a new recruit to COURAGE TO CREATE school, he felt honoured to represent the school in this conference. What an opportunity, he thought, to network with teachers of other schools and debate on the pros and cons of the use of technology in the classroom!

He received his first shock as soon as he arrived at the conference – when he read the profiles of the conference speakers listed in the registration packet. There was not a single practising teacher among them. There were, however, several IT professionals from reputed companies, a representative of UNESCO, a senior government official from the Education Department, a few Principals of schools and one or two authors of textbooks. Praveen soon realised that there were just about a dozen teachers like him in an audience of nearly two hundred. Dominating the crowd were software engineers and government officials from the Education Department. As the conference wore on, the experts took turns in telling the few teachers present how they should teach and use technology to make their classes more interactive and child-friendly.

You would think, Praveen reflected wryly, that at least in the panel discussion, there would be a few teachers. After all, didn't these techies want their end-users to

discuss the utility and value of their products? As the six panellists took their seats through the round of introductions, Praveen was surprised to see that there was only one (retired) teacher on the panel, whose simple elegance contrasted sharply with the flashy attire of the other panellists. Praveen was further disappointed to note that the organisers had cut short the panel discussion to just one hour, because these experts had to catch their flights, and ‘don’t we all know how terrible the traffic is in this city?’ When Praveen and a couple of other teachers tried to raise a question about ground realities in the classroom, they were airily dismissed thus: ‘I’m sure if you tried hard enough, you could figure those things out.’ Another expert said, ‘I have come from afar to share my knowledge with you all. Now it is up to you to either dismiss it or make the best use of it.’ This resulted in an uneasy silence in the room. The retired teacher made a few occasional murmurs, but was quickly sidelined by the other panellists. Praveen noticed one of the teachers in the audience scribbling furiously in her notepad, as she whispered to her neighbour: ‘If we had a proper career, we wouldn’t have to sit here and listen to these people. Look how well they speak and how well settled they look!’

During tea break, Praveen spotted the retired teacher, Rajender, standing all by himself, looking morose. He went up to him and asked cheerfully, ‘Hope you enjoyed the panel discussion?’

Smiling wryly, Rajender replied: ‘Hmm! Did you get that feeling, *beta*? I am not sure why teachers were invited to such a conference, actually. The whole purpose seems to be to showcase software, and show off experts’ knowledge. With thirty years of teaching experience, it seems as though I have nothing much to share with anyone here ...’

Praveen spent the next fifteen minutes listening to a far more articulate Rajender than had been witnessed on the panel. In the remaining time, he met with the few other teachers present and exchanged mobile numbers and email addresses with them. By the time the conference ended, Praveen had a splitting headache and was bursting with questions: What was the place of a teacher in the larger system? Did a teacher have any voice at all? Why on earth did people opt to teach, if this was how they were regarded by the rest of society? By even themselves?



Praveen sighed in exasperation as he stepped out of the Principal's office. What was he supposed to be: a machine of sorts?

He had gone to the Principal's office to share with Mr Narasimhan his disappointment with the conference and to articulate the questions that it had raised for him. To his dismay, he was brusquely told, 'You are still mentally in the conference, Praveen! Come back! There are *real* issues here that we have to deal with. Conferences are just a formality – all part of what is required these days to stay in the business.' Turning to a pile of brochures on his desk, Mr Narasimhan handed Praveen a glossy pamphlet, and emphasised, 'Make sure the students win a prize in this Inter School Science Exhibition!' Upon noticing Praveen's apparent displeasure at being told this, he hastened to add: 'The management is prepared to lend you any support you may need for us to win this year's trophy.'

Despite his agitation, Praveen could not resist smiling at the irony. After all, he had run away from a well-paying IT job in a multinational company because he had been repelled by the aggressively competitive atmosphere during just two years of working there. Against the advice of almost all his friends (and to the chagrin of his deeply disappointed parents), he had switched to school teaching, hoping to fulfil his desire to nurture young minds in a relaxed atmosphere. And now – just six months into his new career – he found that he was being used as a means to win awards for the school in practically every scientific endeavour: quizzes, debates and exhibitions – the works! Whew!

Praveen stepped into the noisy staffroom and looked around at the uniformly dreary faces of his colleagues. Was this how he would be, a few years down the line? The sparkle in his eyes snuffed out, seldom a good thing to say about his workday? Praveen had not yet found a kindred soul in the largely female staff body. His only other male colleagues (Shyam Sir, the P.T. Teacher, and Arun, the *tabla* teacher) were not to be seen right now in the staffroom. (Not that he would have had a vibrant conversation with them either.)

'Have you seen the circular yet?' he heard Mrs Mehta ask Ms Sridharan anxiously. 'We are being called one week earlier this summer: isn't that a shame?'

'But why? A whole week? That means we will get less than two months off in the summer ...' Susmita Ma'am interjected, rolling her eyes in dismay.

'Oh no! My husband has already booked our tickets to Disneyland with the children!' Ms Sridharan's shrill voice rang out.

Several teachers joined in the angry discussion that followed: peppered with their displeasure around students' conduct, management's demands, parent teacher meetings, corrections, exams – just about everything that their daily work entailed!

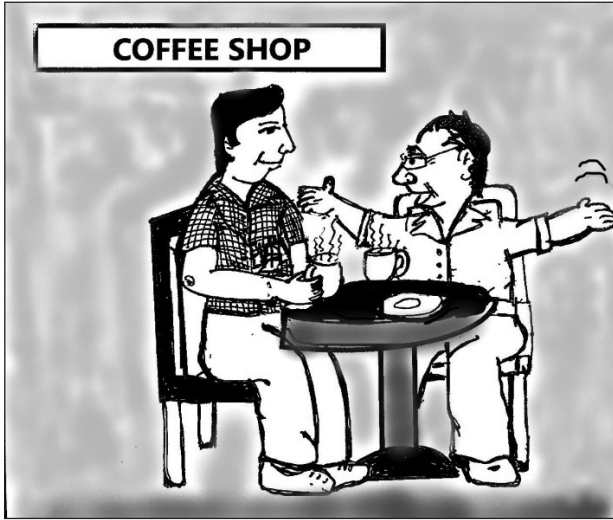
Seated at his desk, Praveen listened to the chorus of grumbles. As he held his head, he sank into thoughtful silence. Why had these teachers opted for this job? Had they? Or had they just slipped into the profession due to a lack of options? Some of them had been in this profession – why, in this very school – for close to two decades. What sustained them? He had found it impossible to stay in his first job for more than two years, and now, in his second job, he could already see his patience running thin.

The website of COURAGE TO CREATE school boasted of allowing each child to learn at his/her own pace, with no comparisons or competition. And here he was, being asked to ensure that the students win every wretched competition there was ... how he wished he could talk to someone who would understand his angst!



It was the weekend after the competition and Praveen had just finished uploading the pictures of the recent Science Exhibition on the school's website (no, they had not won the trophy, much to Mr Narasimhan's dismay). How much longer was he going to have to pitch in for these computer-related tasks? It took so much of his time away from preparing for classes, he thought resentfully. Surely the computer teacher could learn how to do these things? Just because he had worked at an IT company for two years, Mr Narasimhan did not have to dump every computer-related, science-competition-related, administration-software-development task on him ... As his frustration mounted, he decided to take a coffee break. Lost in thought, Praveen ambled into the coffee shop nearby and his eyes rested on a familiar figure seated at the corner table in the far end. It was Mr Rajender, the retired teacher that he had met in the conference! Rajender looked up and waved. Relieved to find some company, Praveen quickly gravitated towards that table, grateful for a sympathetic ear. He decided to seek Rajender's counsel on the problem that he had faced during the recent science exhibition.

‘Sir, how does one decide what is right and wrong when it comes to the use of technology with students? I mean, when can one be guilty of overusing it, and when can one be accused of throwing the baby out with the bath water?’



Rajender looked at him appreciatively as he answered, ‘Beta, during my time, there was no technology. Well, we had chalk, pens, paper, printed books – they counted as technology in those days, but we weren’t bombarded with digital media back then. I don’t know if I am the right person to help with technology-related problems. But I am curious to know what problems a young teacher like you can face with technology.’

Praveen continued, ‘See, sir, in our school, there was a rule that we should not employ technology at all except during computer classes. I fought with the management to allow me to use the Internet, as it would empower students to prepare well for the science exhibition. When I asked students to gather information in order to plan our projects, to my surprise, all of them came up with almost identical responses downloaded from the Internet. When I tried to engage them in discussion around the papers that they had prepared, they were unable to articulate anything meaningful. They hadn’t even read the information that they had cut and pasted from the Internet. They had simply collated the bits and taken colour printouts of the results. So I had to abandon the idea of using the Internet with my students.’ He paused before he added, ‘Isn’t it sad? Technology, if used intelligently, can enhance students’ learning and help them

develop new skills. But now I think the school may have been right about banning technology completely because it can give rise to cheating and dishonesty.’

Rajender, who had been listening patiently until now, nodded as he said, ‘That must be so disappointing for a creative and enthusiastic teacher like you, Praveen. Now, banning the use of technology does seem like an easy way to discourage the kind of questionable practices you described. But I have a different take on it.’

Praveen perked up as Rajender continued, ‘Though I have never used technology with my students, these ethical questions are always part of a teacher’s life. It is up to a teacher to find an answer that empowers the students and the process. Let me think – I may have an idea ...’

Praveen sat up as he said, ‘Oh, yes sir! I am open to anything. I would like my teaching practice to benefit from digital technology. My question is how to strike a balance.’

After a pause, Rajender went on: ‘You can enable your students to use technology ethically, and to their utmost benefit. A few questions are coming to my mind – which, if you agree, can be posed to your students, before you open them up to the world of technology in school: Can every piece of information that you read be 100 per cent true? What is needed for you to be convinced that a particular piece of information is true? Can you specify these evidences or describe how you can go about gathering them? Can you rephrase the information from the source, so that not more than three words per paragraph are borrowed directly from it? Can you document the sections that seem dubious to you and describe how you intend to clarify your doubts? Can you also cite the source from which you have taken bits of information? Pose such questions and then see how they respond.’

Praveen jumped with excitement, ‘Brilliant, sir! I never thought like this! I can see how this could really work.’ And they spoke excitedly about how an exercise such as this would awaken the critical reader and ethical researcher in the student. A dejected Praveen had dawdled into the coffee shop – and a hopeful, excited Praveen now briskly walked out.

As he returned home, he marvelled at how quickly Mr Rajender had come up with such a sound plan. What wisdom! He also remembered how he had sometimes found support while discussing certain issues with his childhood friend Chandani, who was his senior in college and now a teacher in another school. Both of them would occasionally propose solutions to the problems

encountered in their classrooms and staffrooms. He mused, 'Amazing how the collective wisdom that lies inside experienced teachers can enrich young teachers like me – if only there was a way to make such wisdom accessible to the entire teaching community! Why don't teachers share their learnings and struggles with each other? So much learning can come out of sharing these experiences within the staff body of any given school!' But he had not seen anyone engaging in such exchanges in his own school so far.



There was such a vacuum here: in six months of working in this school, he had not found anyone with whom he could talk about the questions that were clamouring for his attention. All his energy was taken up in meeting everyday demands, and this seemed to be true of all the other teachers as well.

'Even if there are like-minded teachers like me,' he pondered, 'I haven't had a moment's breathing space to find them! It's just rush-rush-rush, all the time!' In the hours that followed, Praveen felt a noticeable lightening of the heart. It took some time for him to realise that it was the simple act of reaching out to Rajender that had lifted his spirits.

Delving into the conference registration packet, he pulled out a complimentary CD, which invited him to create an online discussion forum. Praveen now felt an overwhelming urge to connect with other teachers. He wondered if he could use the forum to draw some of the teachers that he had recently met at the conference into an enriching discussion. He titled the forum TEACHER CHATTER and briskly began sending out invites to them all.



Praveen: Hi guys! Back in school, all of you? How did you guys find the conference? What was your takeaway from there?

Would teachers respond? He wondered. Unlike most of his friends, Praveen was not addicted to social media. So it was not until the following weekend that he checked the forum, and was he surprised! There were quite a few responses to his query ...

Teacher Chatter

Joydeep: Good to reconnect, Praveen, after that wasteful conference! Wasn't the conference mainly from the techie's vantage point? What was there in it for us, teachers, *yaar*? My takeaway question was: do teachers matter?

Shalini Gupta: Yes, the teacher hardly seems to matter. This reminds me of the party where I went with a friend who was working with UNESCO. Another guest was interrogating her about her job and outlook – particularly on the subject of education. Seeing her clearly tiring of his pompous questions, I tried to rescue my friend by answering one of them, but was cut short and bluntly told, 'I wanted an expert's view. You are *just a teacher!*' I was stunned. Worse, standing beside him was his wife – herself a high school teacher – who just laughed away the entire conversation.

Rajender: I think every one of us will have such stories. In my hometown, the local grocery store owner once approached me with a strange request. He asked me to accompany his fifteen-year-old son to (and from) the Board Exam Centre, as he could not incur the loss that would result from leaving his business unattended for half a day. When I pointed out that I had a job too, and that many young students would miss their classes if I absented myself, he could not see that as being in any way as bad as his loss of half a day's business!

Supriya: Oh god! That is so typical of our money-centric society, isn't it? Bet they would never have asked a doctor to step in for such help! That's because doctors have always been respected ...

Priya Kashyap: But it wasn't always like this in India, right? I recall my parents telling me stories of how the teacher in the village was always a highly respected figure. Teachers never made that much money – that is true – but they were respected by society in those days.

Praveen: All this makes me wonder, then – why would anyone opt to become a teacher, if this is how we are regarded?

Joydeep: Why would anyone opt to teach, *yaar?* With a master's in physics, I didn't land the corporate job that I wanted. The physics teacher in the neighbourhood school had just left, and they offered me that post. *Haan, bhai*, it's all a question of our daily bread finally ...!

Supriya: I just wanted to get some job: any job, I mean. And this is what I got! Still new to teaching, though ... this is my first year.

Kamini Goel: I always wanted to be a social worker. That's why I did my master's in social work. I come from a family of teachers, you know. When I married an Army man, and we moved from one city to another, the only job that I could easily get was that of a teacher ... even though I wanted something better for myself.

Chandani: *Arre, Rajenderji* and *Goel Ma'am*, my family, too! *Pataa hai*, in my case, I grew up feeling that teaching is a very lively thing to do on a day-to-day basis. It never becomes boring as every child is different and every situation is different. Plus working hours and breaks are so aligned with one's family life – *aur kya chahiye?*

Shalini Gupta: Yes, indeed! Becoming a teacher was an unquestioned destination for me. And now I am Principal of a school ... still learning the ropes, though!



Praveen had had a very frustrating day. The Principal had given permission for certain classes to be cancelled in order to practise for the Independence Day celebrations, and of course, Praveen's carefully planned physics and chemistry classes for Grades VII and VIII had been struck off without any consultation with him!

'Now, when I am asked why I did not complete the syllabus, I will cite this,' he fumed. Then he caught himself. He realised that he was beginning to sound exactly like the others in the staffroom! Clutching at the first opportunity to shift the blame on external factors: oh my god! If he could get sucked into this negative

pattern of thinking so quickly, could he really blame the long timers for being so completely entrenched in it? That would probably be him, if he stayed in this school long enough.

Scuttling away into a quiet corner in the computer lab (all computer classes had been cancelled, too), Praveen opened Teacher Chatter to take his mind off such depressing possibilities ... after all, he had recently shared his coffee shop interaction with Rajender and then posed an interesting question to the respondents of his first post: have any of you ever been enriched by the inputs of a colleague?



Manas: Oh yes! It is not often that one finds a like-minded colleague, given the deep-rooted conditioning that we are all unconscious victims of. So each time I spotted a potential mentor in a teacher, I always used the opportunity to my benefit ...

Supriya: How cool is that! I mean, finding mentors in colleagues?

Chandani: Supriya, *bilkul!* I know exactly what you mean. You know, I once reached the end of my tether with a child in Grade V who was not responding to my best efforts. She was the daughter of a trustee and I could see that she was super confident that she could not *but* be promoted, no matter how she performed. I was so nervous with her that I appeared strict.

Supriya: A nervous teacher appearing strict? That's so cool!

Chandani: It wasn't so cool, though! But one day, when I shared my perception with an older colleague, she immediately sensed that this child was not pompous or arrogant, but was actually lacking in self-confidence. I decided to go along with that perception – I was so desperate, you see! And guess what? That shifted my entire approach, and caused a dramatic turnaround in that child!

Priya Kashyap: Chandani, that is so remarkable! You went along with a perception that you were not yet convinced of – and then, your experience bore it out! How often do we even allow such a shift to occur!

Joydeep: I don't expect support from other teachers! See, I just depend on my confidence, *yaar*. I know that I will be able to do it.

Amit: Hey folks! It doesn't always have to be that we learn from other teachers. You know, I have had a very powerful learning from students – when I went around asking them how they regard exams. I would love to share that tale with you all ...

* * *

Praveen sank into his chair, happy about the day he had just had. The Archimedes' Principle had evoked a lively debate amongst his Grade VIII students. He had also interacted with his colleague, Shloka, a biology teacher, and had been touched by her narrative. Shloka, a doctor by training, had told him that she was lost and needed support – which, she admitted, was so hard to find here. Smiling at the prospect of acquiring another participant for his forum, Praveen said: 'Are you on Teacher Chatter? No? Then why don't you join the discussion there?' Shloka was delighted and promised to respond to his forum invitation.

As Praveen sipped his tea, he found himself reaching for his laptop. This project had definitely gripped his attention. He now found himself gravitating towards Teacher Chatter at every given opportunity. He was curious to see if the teacher network had responded to his request to share more of their stories of struggle and growth.

* * *

Teacher
Chatter

Rajender: Praveen, my first year of teaching was terrible, unhappy, confused. *Beta*, I was in a job that I hated. I felt trapped and angry. I often heard my students say that I was a very strict taskmaster. I can now see that I just stuck to 'chalk and talk' method during the first few years – focusing completely on covering the content.

Supriya: But then, Rajenderji, why did you opt to become a teacher and then, remain a teacher all your life, I mean, if you felt so trapped and angry?

Rajender: *Haan, beti*, I lost my father early and had to take up the first job that was available. Thanks to my students, I stayed on! You see, students often looked for openings to casual conversations. They must have connected to something in me because they started sharing their personal problems. It was then that I saw that I had this great opportunity – that of moulding the next generation. *This* was the game changer for me.

Shloka: Good morning, everyone! Thank you, Praveen, for introducing me to this forum. I am touched by your account, Rajenderji. I am a doctor by training. I left my medical practice and became a teacher, because I felt trapped over *there*! I thought that *this* is where real changes can take root.

Supriya: That's awesome! I never heard of a doctor turning into a teacher. I mean, unusual switch, no?

Shloka: Yes. I switched because I felt compelled to take decisions that were not in the best interests of my patients but rather benefitted the bottom-lines of various industries – the pharmaceuticals, the diagnostics and the hospital management. I found my conscience being challenged every single day. So I decided to quit.

Rajender: Then teaching must have been a challenge, Dr Shloka?

Shloka: Yes. I was only given a fifteen-minute brief in the Principal's office and then left to figure things out on my own.

Supriya: Isn't that awful, Shloka? Wouldn't it be nice if we could get some guidance – I mean, at least in our first year of teaching?

Shloka: Yes, but you know, being a doctor – I discovered that I could teach biology from a very *live* perspective – I soon found that I was good in the classroom.

Shalini Gupta: Hmm. Funny how, for me, I never found such things difficult. My difficulty was more with the management – the rules that they imposed

on teachers. In my first year, I often found myself giving explanations for trivialities – like why students were talking in class, even if they were discussing the lesson. I am acutely aware of this now, as a Principal.

Priya Kashyap: Nice to know that being a teacher can make one a more sensitive Principal! Administrators need to be human ...

* * *

The next two weeks flew by with Praveen setting the papers for mid-term exams and correcting answer sheets. As if the school's requirements relating to the setting of the question papers weren't annoying enough ('You must ensure that you include Board Exam types of questions as far as possible'), he found himself getting impatient with the children's responses as well. They had participated commendably in class, and had even done the laboratory experiments with enthusiasm. But why was it that they had not shown a commensurate level of understanding in their answer sheets? Small wonder that he had not found any time at all to visit Teacher Chatter and this, of course, was adding to his restlessness.

Tonight, he resolved that no matter what, he would connect with his tribe and read their responses to his most recent query.



Praveen: Interesting. Willy nilly, we have all become teachers – only a few of us chose to do so. Rajenderji, I am tempted to ask – over the years, you must have gathered many interesting episodes that you can recount. With students, parents, teachers, the management – have you ever shared these stories with others?

Rajender: You are right, *beta*. Like everyone here, I have lots of stories! But who is to listen? You happened to ask me for my take, the other day. How often do people even consider the fact that there is immense scope for learning from an experienced teacher?

Shalini Gupta: Oh yes! I have many stories from my days as a teacher. And now, as a Principal, I also have thoughts on ways in which the two roles

differ and interact. I think there is a lot that we can gain from documenting these perceptions.

Elsa Daniels: You know, I have always loved reading, literature ... so, I wonder if I could turn anecdotes from my teaching career into a piece of reading, if not literature ...? Would anyone read them?

Joydeep: When we hardly find the time to teach, assess, attend staff meetings and the rest – who is to sit and document our experiences, *yaar*? And moreover, like Ms Daniels says, who will care to read them?

Manas: Very valid point, Joydeep Sir! Time is the biggest crunch, especially for teachers – but is there some way out?

* * *

Mr Narasimhan convened an urgent meeting of the entire staff body ‘to share something important’. He started by saying, ‘I have been thinking about why some of our students are so passive. I don’t find them thinking creatively at all. Why don’t they show some initiative? Why are they not curious enough? And imagine, I came across this interview with Mr Steve Wozniak, co-founder of Apple. What he said makes so much sense! According to him, the Indian education system is too rigid with its emphasis on examinations and bookish knowledge. It does not prepare its students for the 21st century.’

Praveen could not believe his ears. Wasn’t it just the other day that he had been pulled up for conducting a survey with Grade IX students on the relevance of physics in real life? Mr Narasimhan’s words rang loud and clear even now in his mind: ‘Do not waste your students’ time, Praveen. You are new and idealistic. But, at the end of the day, what pays is how well they perform in their exams. And your survey with students has no bearing whatsoever on their final exam.’ When Praveen had tried to explain how this kind of exploration could help them form a deep relationship with the subject and also develop their creative thinking, he was cut short, ‘Consider it a warning, Praveen. Stick to the curriculum.’

‘Then what has changed now? Does he even remember that conversation? Or is it because a renowned technology mogul, what’s more, the co-founder of

Apple and a foreigner is saying it, it is now the Gospel truth?’ As these thoughts raged in his mind, he remembered Shalini’s comment on Teacher Chatter. ‘Was a teacher’s expertise valued and respected by anyone at all?’ He wondered. This online community of teachers had started forging bonds that felt so intimate and comfortable: why couldn’t they form a teaching-learning community? Slowly, an idea began forming in Praveen’s mind ...

The logo for 'Teacher Chatter' is a black square with the words 'Teacher' and 'Chatter' stacked vertically in a white, handwritten-style font.

Praveen: You know, all this is making me think: don’t we all have numerous stories that play out in our daily lives? And don’t they all revolve around teaching, learning, failing, succeeding, confronting, ducking, valuing, humiliating – *living*, in short?

Joydeep: *Yaar*, does anyone realise how much we think about our work, the challenges that we constantly face, the kind of pressures we have to deal with ... as teachers?

Supriya: This discussion has helped me see that at least *some of us* regard our work as meaningful! I mean, it helps so much to talk to others who think like I do ...

Chandani: Yes, Joydeep and Supriya, when we feel like this, why is it that the rest of the world regards our work as insignificant and routine?

Elsa Daniels: But what can we do? Our profession does not qualify as a ‘good job’ – money, prestige and movement up the hierarchy are necessary for that. How can you and I change this system?

Praveen: We can’t change the system overnight. But we can make a beginning by trying to change the way the teaching profession is *perceived*. I can see that we work hard, we delight in interacting with our students, we care for them and we feel deeply about making learning fun and meaningful.

Chandani: Yes, Praveen. But who’s to know (or care) that there are teachers like us? And how on earth can we change perceptions of people out there? I mean, it’s hard enough trying to change one’s own perception of things ...

Praveen: Okay, guys, maybe I was stretching things too far. But we – teachers – need to stand up for ourselves. It really bothers me when *teachers themselves* regard their profession as being inferior. So others treat it that way too! Listen, let's share our stories with some writers – and let them put those stories out into the world for people to read and discuss. Even in my short time as a teacher, I have a few tales to tell ... I'm sure that experienced teachers like you will have hundreds of fascinating stories!

Supriya: What a fantastic idea! Spinning yarns is always fun, I mean – and drawing from our everyday stories to spin them is even better. I'm in!

Amit: So am I!

Manas: Agreed. Let's share our *true stories* and stand up for the teaching community. I am with you, gang!

Praveen: Cool! So send in your teaching tales, guys! Let's set the ball rolling!

* * *

Praveen felt energised as he returned to his lesson planning for the next day. What had started out as an effort just to vent out his frustrations and pose some burning questions – with no grand plan in mind – resulted in something so exciting! Perhaps a story or two would roll in – and this could feed into further discussion on this online forum?

What took him completely by surprise was the pace at which the stories simply poured in – stories of all sizes written by teachers new and experienced, characters so real that they popped out of pages, questions so intense that he could barely stop thinking about them ... whoever thought that there was so much drama in a teacher's life? So much of the macrocosm in the microcosm? Whew! Dull? Routine? Insignificant and unambitious? Not as far-reaching and impactful as a well-paying corporate job? He dearly wished to challenge any reader of these tales to continue to hold that opinion.

And these are the stories that fill the pages which follow ...