

# Beyond the CLASSROOM

Amid the Coronavirus outbreak, educational organisations have ensured that the teaching-learning process continues through digital platforms

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The Coronavirus outbreak got everything shut including schools and colleges and that led to cancellation of exams. But tiding over the problem, many educational organisations are continuing their classes via digital platforms including Whatsapp, YouTube, Gmail, Zoom and others.

## Learning should never stop

Speaking of the stress in the education system, Shaheen Mistri, CEO, Teach For India, says, "The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in unprecedented global closures of schools. More than 85 per cent of students are out of schools and locked up in their homes. But children from marginalised communities will be the most affected in all parts of the world as they have the least access to ongoing educational, nutritional, and health services."

The organisation is taking initiatives to ensure that students don't stop learning. A fellow of Teach For India, **Tanya Duckworth**, made it a point to talk to her students about the pandemic and what rules one needs to follow in order to keep oneself safe like keeping one-metre distance, washing hands frequently, and not touching your face.

"Before continuing with our regular syllabus, we have a 30-minute session where we discuss things happening all over the globe. Earlier, before the schools were shut, we informed and cautioned our students about Covid-19," she says.

Akanksha Foundation believes that mental well-being of the children is as important. "Along with online subject-based sessions, the Foundation is encouraging students to follow their passion and urging parents to help them out. The children are making cooking videos, stitching clothes, playing instruments, singing, drawing, etc," says **Jayshree Oberoi**, senior director, schools, The Akanksha Foundation, Pune.

## Worried about the IQ

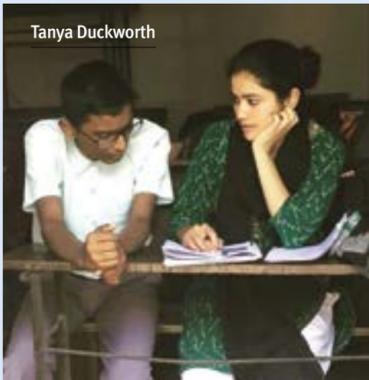
Often, after the two-month summer vacation, students' learning levels drop. Now, due to the shutdown, the vacations have been extended which is going to affect the kids even more. So the Teach For India fellows are working together to come up with



iTeach Schools' students studying on tablet



Tanya Duckworth



newer ideas to engage kids. Duckworth is taking online classes.

"However, this also comes with a restriction. We are not able to reach each and every student. There are many kids who have gone back to their hometown with their parents. Without any internet connection or network available to them there, it is quite tough to make the learning happen every day," says Duckworth who is teaching the kids who are in the city and have a smartphone.

## Taking digital safety measures

Zoom app, WhatsApp, and text messages are some of the mediums the teachers are using. However, the digital platforms have to be shared with kids with a lot of caution. When asked, how do they make sure that kids do not access anything on the internet that is not meant for them, Duckworth says, "I did my research on how to conduct a breach-free session. I got to know that there's something called a waiting room. The participant first enters that and after that, when the host allows him/her, the person can join in the session."

On the other hand, teachers from The Akanksha Foundation are using online platforms like Google classrooms to teach children. Children are doing their assignments and projects by researching online. The organisation is making it a point to not share any social platform with kids which could lead the students to the content that is not age-appropriate.

Also, teachers from the Foundation are in constant touch with their students and parents through phone calls and WhatsApp. "The teachers are sharing study worksheets, assignments, video tutorials and online reading resources with parents enabling them to have a track of their child's learning and also what they are accessing," says Oberoi.

## Updated knowledge

Teachers from both organisations are updating their own skills and knowledge every day too. Teach For India fellows meet online and discuss how they can enhance their students' knowledge. They themselves study, research and come up with various ideas. So, learning is going on for both the students and the teachers.

"As students continue to learn, so do our teachers. The teachers are reading a lot and doing research on different topics. Also, our principals are being trained. We are trying to make the most of this quarantine and keep learning continuously. The teachers are using this time for personal development by doing online courses," points out Oberoi.

## Help in need

There are kids who come from the families of daily wage workers, house helps, auto drivers, etc. The lockdown has affected them and they are struggling to make ends meet. Therefore, The Akanksha Foundation is trying to provide some basic groceries to around 1,500 families. "We know it's not short term. The crisis is much longer for them, hence, the onus is on us to help them in this phase," says Oberoi.

Catering to the students from slum areas who cannot afford to have a single android phone, **iTeach Schools**, an educational organisation, provided some of these kids with tablets.

"Since Pune was one of the very first cities to shut down schools, these kids could not get to study which they were getting to do with help from some organisations. Also, the lockdown is making an impact on their mental health. Getting stuck with 4-5 people in one room is not easy, and hence, we planned to approach this issue," says **Luv Kumar**, Fundraising and Communications Associate, iTeach Schools.

Before opting for the four-hour online sessions everyday via WhatsApp, Google classroom, messages, etc., teachers themselves took training. "We focus on the holistic development of the child. While we run this online school model, we ensure that our counsellors and teachers are regularly checking in with the kids," he says, adding that it is important that children absorb what is being taught instead of just being present on the screen.

## Helping them stay connected

"We got a survey done to know whether these students will be able to continue studying via online platforms. Fifty per cent of these families do not have internet connection for more than two hours. Therefore, we got their mobile recharges done. We also gave tablets to some kids who couldn't access any device," he tells.

They have asked parents to monitor their kids so that the latter focus on studies. "We have given the ownership to the students to use the resources in the best of their interest rather than doing something off-limit or not required at all," he concludes.



Jayshree Oberoi



Luv Kumar

# 'We do a lot of activities together'

...says actor-writer Sumeet Vyas who, along with actress wife Ekta Kaul, is preparing for the birth of their first child in May

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A few weeks ago, actor couple Sumeet Vyas and Ekta Kaul on their social media announced that they are expecting their first child. Since then, they have been uploading pictures of their life together during the lockdown. The actress is due next month.

Pregnant women often go through an emotional roller-coaster during this phase. And with the lockdown and the scare of the infection looming large, their anxiety levels could be really high. In such circumstances, the responsibility falls on the husband to not just take care of the wife's physical needs but also emotional ones. Sumeet says that

"Maybe god wanted humans to spend time with themselves and with nature, which we had ruined. It's getting to breathe again. Factories are closed; vehicles are not running on the road, we can now hear birds chirping, and plants seem to be smiling. We had taken things that we have, like food, clothes, for granted but now we are appreciating these things. There are so many people who are in difficulty, they are not getting anything to eat, they can't reach their homes. We should respect everything that god had given us," says the actor who is also writing a few film and web scripts and plans to work on them later this year.

As far as physical activities are concerned, Sumeet says that the two of them go for a walk within their society after taking all necessary precautions.



they do a lot of activities together to keep a positive environment around. "I cook, we have chats, play ludo together," he says, adding that because of the lockdown, he is spending a lot of time at home with Ekta which wouldn't have been possible otherwise.

Initially, he used to do all the cooking, house cleaning and Ekta used to chip in with cooking because she enjoys it. "Before the lockdown began, our house-help started staying with us, so now we are getting help. Otherwise, it used to be hectic for Ekta. I also couldn't spend too much time with her because household activities used to take a lot of my time," says Sumeet who married the *Rab Se Sohna Isshq, Mere Angne Mein* actress in 2018.

He says that they try to have very limited chat about stuff that spreads negativity and also avoid watching such stuff. "We have very minimal chat about Covid-19. Nobody has a solution to it yet, so what more can we discuss? We watch news for half an hour in the evening to keep ourselves updated about what's happening and where, that's all," he says.

He adds that the two of them are looking at the situation more positively.

"We need to get out of the home for some time and inhale the fresh air. But we maintain distance from others and walk for half an hour," he points out.

The *Permanent Roommates* actor says has learnt a lot in the last eight months and got different types of advices even though he doesn't take much advice from others. "I wanted to make mistakes and learn from them. If you learn from other's experiences, it is not so much of fun," he adds.

Although nothing has gone according to their plans in the last few months, they are happy with the way things are. Sumeet wants to teach some valuable lessons to his child when s/he grows up. "I want to make my child sensitive towards others and their problems, which is very necessary. It could be a minute thing like not parking your car in the middle of road to do your work, because that would create problem for others. This kind of consciousness is hardly seen among people and I feel sad about it," he says.

"I used to always think when I have a child, I will make him/her conscious about these small little things because they turn out to be bigger problems in the future," the actor concludes.

## Covid-19 effect: 'Spider-Man' sequels delayed

Marvel Cinematic Universe's third Spider-Man film and the sequel to the hit *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse* have been pushed amid the shuffle in release dates owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hollywood studios have been revamping release schedules due to the ongoing crisis. Now, Sony Pictures has pushed back its two untitled Spider-Man sequels for several months, reports *variety.com*.

The studio announced that Marvel-Sony's *Spider-Man Far From Home* sequel has moved from July 16, 2021 to November 5, 2021. Sony Pictures Animation's *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse* sequel has been delayed by six months from April 8, 2022, to October 7, 2022.

Tom Holland's *Spider-Man: Far From Home* was one of the most successful films of 2019, grossing \$1.13 billion at the worldwide box office. The rescheduled film is the third installment in the franchise, which launched in 2017 with *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse* grossed \$375 million worldwide and won last year's Academy Award for Best Animated Movie.

Holland's video-game adaptation *Uncharted* has moved forward from October



8, 2021 to July 16, 2021, a slot which was previously occupied by his *Spider-Man Far From Home* sequel.

The studio has also updated *The Nightingale*, starring Dakota Fanning and Elle Fanning, from its Christmas Day release. Based on Kristin Hannah's 2015 bestseller, *The Nightingale* tells the story of two sisters coming of age in France on the eve of World War II, and their struggle to survive the Nazi occupation of France. The film has not been shot yet.

The studio has also moved back the Kevin

Hart drama *Fatherhood* six months from October 23, 2020, to April 2, 2021. Paul Weitz is directing *Fatherhood* from a screenplay he wrote alongside Dana Stevens. It is based upon the *Two Kisses For Maddy: A Memoir Of Loss And Love* by Matthew Logelin.

Sony also pushed back its action comedy *Man From Toronto* nearly a year to September 17, 2021, from November 20, 2020. The studio moved *Hotel Transylvania 4* forward by four months from December 22, 2021 to August 6, 2021. *ST*

## The pandemic is a pause, let's give back to nature, says Dia Mirza

If Indians needed a visible sign of how nature responds to man's behaviour, then the thousands of flamingos that arrived at Sewri's wetlands on the outskirts of Mumbai were one. Experts say there has been a 25 per cent increase in flamingo migration since last year.

United Nations Advocate for Sustainable Development Goals, Dia Mirza recently highlighted this man-nature relationship on *#DownToEarthWithDee* on Instagram. The actress was part of a special session which was also attended by Gaur Gopal Das, Nehara Pandey, and Ankur Tewari.

Das and Dia, both dwell on human beings' constant need to consume more than they require. Das said that the onus of the 'crime' to do so is equally shared — by the industrial revolution which promotes consumerism and individuals who buy more than what they need.

The conversation, led to an

important subject — the urban conflict. Das said there is no need for people who live in cities to feel guilty. "I am an urban monk and we as urban people have a sense of guilt which we can do away with. What we need to concentrate on is how to reduce what we take from nature."

To which Dia replied, "We can do various things to help the earth despite living in urban spaces — segregating waste, saving water, not using single-use plastic are some."

Dia added how support for the earth's cause does not come easily. "Some fifteen years ago when I started to actively give back to nature, there were few people in the film industry who felt the same. Today, from Arjun Kapoor, Alia Bhatt to Bhumi Pednekar, all do their bit for the environment and wildlife," Dia explained.

Ever since the actress started *#DownToEarthWithDee* three Wednesdays ago, she has been inviting guests every week. *ST*

