

In Conversation with Toppers of TPO 2016

As part of a series of interviews, Sejal Nevatia from Centre for Teacher Accreditation (CENTA) speaks with toppers of the CENTA Teaching Professionals' Olympiad TPO 2016, a unique national competition to reward, recognize and celebrate teachers, held with The Hindu and Michael & Susan Dell Foundation as primary partners.



Rukmani Ramachandran, Manager, Learning and Development, Cuemath; National Topper of TPO 2016 (also Karnataka Region Topper)

Sejal (CENTA): I believe you taught non-English speaking engineering students in English medium. How was that experience?

Rukmani: Yes, I taught Biomedical Engineering courses in English to students from Tamil medium background.

I realised that they were not struggling with the subject or concepts, but rather the language. Then I tried implementing a mix of Tamil and English in my instruction. What helped the most was allowing them the freedom to respond to questions in Tamil. Sometimes, they would stop and ask for the right way to express the same thing in English. As a group, we also built the habit of using non-verbal ways to communicate; e.g. visuals and using our own bodies to demonstrate.

Sejal: What made you transition from a formal teacher to a different role in the education sector?

Rukmani: I found many students flocking to engineering because they saw it as a default or as a ticket to jobs rather than as a profession. So I was helping create engineering graduates but not engineers. Since then, I have committed my work to helping learners – young and old – learn to be workforce ready.

“Teaching is not about sharing what I know; it is about understanding how my students learn.”

Sejal: Could you briefly describe your current role?

Rukmani: My current role is to prepare independent teachers become part of the Cuemath network, and take on the challenge of teaching young children math the ‘right way’. This role has given me the dual perspective of adult and childhood learning. I work directly with teachers, so I see how difficult it is to unlearn, and how important continuous learning is for professional growth. But since my learners work with children, it gives me a front row seat to view the impact that we are creating.

Sejal: Tell us something interesting about yourself.

Rukmani: I started doing stand-up comedy in late 2011 and performed for the next three years in the US and India. Apart from this, I am a passionate, self-taught baker.



Anupama Karthik, School Teacher, Army Public School; Karnataka Regional Rank 7, National Rank 46

Sejal (CENTA): When did you decide to choose teaching as a profession?

Anupama: I started my career in the Hospitality industry followed by a stint in HR. But the shift happened during my husband (an army officer)’s, posting in Ranchi. My employment as a substitute teacher triggered my passion for education and led me to become a Primary Teacher. My thanks to Col G S Rana, Principal, Army School, Babina Cantt and my mother-in-law, Mrs Jayanthi Balachandran, who motivated and supported me to complete my B.Ed. in Special Education.

Sejal: Did your former role in hospitality help you in any way in being a good teacher?

Anupama: Yes. Firstly, it had boosted my confidence and increased my threshold of patience. Also, I had learnt the special skill of handling people of all kinds without

losing my temper. It had improved my interpersonal and leadership skills.

“My thanks are due to Mrs. Manjula Raman, Principal, Army Public School, K Kamaraj Road, Bangalore, for motivating me to take part in the TPO. She is my source of inspiration and guidance.”

Sejal: Is there something special or different about teaching in Army Public Schools?

Anupama: The students in Army Public School speak different languages, differ in their social and economic status, follow different religions... and there are a few first generation learners too. They face more problems than other children due to the frequent transfer of their parents – once in 2 years in some cases. I feel that in such situations the responsibility of the teachers increases many fold.

Sejal: Apart from teaching, what would you call your favourite hobby?

Anupama: Writing poetry is my passion. Till date, I have written about 40 poems out of which 5 have been published in ‘SPANDAN’, a book of educators’ poems released by Army Welfare Education Society.