



THE TIMES OF INDIA

When over two million
unlettered Indian kids said
'Jai Ho'

**Social Strategy: Best strategic
thinking for social impact**

JAY CHIAT AWARDS FOR STRATEGIC EXCELLENCE 2009

When over two million unlettered Indian kids said 'Jai Ho'

This case study is about transforming the lives of disadvantaged Indian children through education. It is perhaps the largest such program in history; a shining example of how a volunteer movement, created for a newspaper, aims to eradicate illiteracy.

India is home to one in three illiterates worldwide. 75 million are children.

Paradoxically, this country also has the 3rd largest population of college graduates.

The Teach India initiative sought to build a bridge across this chasm, through volunteer action.

Despite worshipping knowledge, despite enjoying better lives as a resultant of higher education, middle class India has shied away from large scale volunteerism to teach.

This wasn't apathy; they hesitated due to a complex mix of physical & emotional impediments.

The initiative, indeed every element, addressed these factors. Working together, they demolished every barrier which existed, either on ground or in the mind.

Our clarion call was Let's Learn to Teach.

We delivered this message through an integrated campaign.

At the last count, we had begun transforming the lives of over two million children through the over 100,000 volunteer teachers.

Who wants to be a Slumdog Millionaire?

Who wants to be a Slumdog?

Truth is, no one. Not in real life, not in reel life.

How do you avoid being one? By going to school, by getting an education.

Underprivileged kids do enroll, only to drop out because of the pressure to earn. This creates an ever increasing population of poor illiterates and semi-literates, trapping them & their progeny in a vicious cycle of poverty, little or no education and thus zero social mobility.

India is home to one out of every three illiterates on the planet. 75 Million of them are children.

A paradox of enormous proportions

India is also home to the largest number of English educated people on the planet.

India's higher education system, 300 + universities, 15,600 colleges produce 2.5 million graduates each year, third behind US and recently China. 500,000 engineering students graduate, twice the number produced by the US!

This large mass of highly educated Indians co-exists with a large mass of illiterates. Planning saw an opportunity to catalyze real social change in these unhappy statistics.

Enter: The Times of India

The Times of India is the largest English news paper in India; the crown jewel of Bennett & Coleman, India's largest media group. Their vision is to evolve from being a social mouth piece to a catalyst for social change.

Education is the strongest driver of social change anywhere. What is more apt than a newspaper picking up the gauntlet to fight illiteracy?

Which is why we chose to direct our energies to this cause.





Genesis of the Teach India initiative

A simple idea: Bring together people who could teach and those who wanted to learn.

Given the large educated population, what could be easier than motivating them to volunteer and teach the unlettered?

Plenty, as we discovered.

First, volunteerism in India is largely tactical

Most volunteers jump in during times of calamities or crises; be it the Tsunami, a terrorist attack or a train accident. They come in, help out and then revert to the routine of their daily lives.

Teaching, on the other hand, requires sustained involvement.

Second, despite revering education, few educated Indians volunteer to teach

Hindus, 80.5% of Indians, worship the goddess of knowledge, Saraswati.

Teachers are highly revered and adored by educated Indians.

India's spectacular growth has been largely driven by a middle class who have benefited from high quality, state funded education. Education is thus highly prized, as a means to getting better jobs and lifestyles.

They are troubled by illiteracy & semi-literacy plaguing India.

Ask them if they would volunteer to teach illiterates. Hushed silence is usually followed by protests : too much to do, don't have the time.

Why were they unwilling ?



Was it inertia? Or apathy?

We set out to understand what.

A complex array of underlying causes

Doctors, lawyers, teachers, computer programmers, call centre agents, bankers, clerks, government bureaucrats; we interviewed them across India, in English, in myriad local languages. We used friendship triads, depth interviews, straight questions & projective techniques.

We heard a similar refrain across India. Here is a sample conversation with a computer engineer:

“You are a mathematics wizard”, we asked her, “shouldn’t you be sharing that skill with the less educated?”

She replied “Yes, I could, but I don’t know where to find them.”

“Even if I find them, I don’t know if I could engage with students. Teaching is special, not everyone can do it. I can’t!”

“I do want to give back to society..but..”

Discovering this pattern was our eureka moment.

Anxiety, not apathy or inertia, was our enemy

We summarized this complex pattern as Performance Anxiety; that was our insight.



This insight helped create our “product”

Performance anxiety, as we sensed, was holding back concerned Indians from becoming change agents for this vital cause. Physical impediments like getting students or a space to teach compounded the emotional fears of failure.

Planning now ensured that this insight was used to demolish impediments which might deter altruistic Indians. After all, we were creating a movement, not just another message.

“Give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the world.”, said Archimedes.

The Teach India movement gave people both a lever and a place to stand.

If you thought you couldn't teach, we would train you.

If you worried about getting students, we provided eager students waiting for teachers, a full pipeline.

If distance was an issue, we matched your location with an NGO and pupils next to you.

The central theme, too, was driven by the insight

Conventional thinking and past social programs had always issued calls for volunteers to teach. This noble thought has been oft repeated, always resulting in marginal success.

Let's Learn to Teach was our clarion call.

This went straight for the jugular, tackling all anxieties about their ability to create sustainable change through volunteerism.

It propelled them to vanquish their inertia and become dynamos of action.

All we asked for was **two hours a week**.

Who could refuse that? Perhaps, not too many.

“The Teach India initiative asks precisely two hours of you. You'll find them wastefully strewn around coffee shops, multiplexes, park benches, college canteens, smoking areas, traffic jams and most often in front of TV sets.

Give them to us, those two hours that you casually toss aside on a whim. And you'll see how they could give that shiny-eyed flower girl a shot at changing her family's destiny forever. Or a 6 year old boy the chance to polish his future instead of your shoes.

Do you have to do this? You don't.

Should you do it?

Well, let's just say you have two choices.

And one is clearly greater than the other.”





We also convinced Aamir Khan, one of India's top actors, whose last major role, fittingly, was a teacher for a dyslexic child in the blockbuster film *Taare Zameen Par* (Stars on the Ground), to come on board. He not only volunteered for the program but also made an appearance in a TV commercial to promote the cause. For free.

His involvement propelled the program to even greater heights.

This evocative message worked across media

We were aiming to reach just about everyone: Principals, CEOs, housewives, college students, doctors, engineers, you name it, and we needed them.

Our media mix needed all the power we could muster:

- The emotive power of TV
- The persuasiveness of print
- The ubiquity of ambience
- The drama of on-ground activation
- The one-to-one power of the web
- The urgency of direct response
- The appeal of personal example

Our campaign was supported by print (we were a Times of India initiative, India's largest English daily, after all), television, the Web, outdoor, on-ground events and PR.

www.teach.timesofindia.com became the resource centre for the initiative.

In all, 28 direct response advertisements in print, three television commercials with multiple edits, ten outdoor creatives, bookmarks, car stickers, elevator stickers were created.

We called out for volunteers at all levels

We needed everyone and anyone:

- Individuals who could teach and were willing to donate their time
- NGOs who were working with illiterate & semi-literate children
- Schools that could provide physical space to hold sessions
- Companies who would sponsor and support the initiative

The internal target was 5000 volunteers who could be trained to teach. No other program had come even close to this number.

The response has been overwhelming

The campaign exceeded and indeed exploded all expectations.

100,000 volunteers & counting. The first ten days saw over 10,000 volunteers sign up. We were forced to pause the campaign at 100,000, because our drive to recruit volunteers outpaced the NGOs ability to recruit students.

60+ NGOs recruited eager students-to-be

32 schools donated space to conduct classes

31 companies supported the initiative, both in terms of sponsorship and volunteers.

550,000 visits to the website; 6000 + Video downloads

Actor Aamir Khan continues to teach for two hours every week.

Two million children, at the last count, are learning, thanks to Teach India.

A drop in the ocean.

But a beginning.

A snippet of a TIME magazine cover from October 20, 2008. The word "TIME" is printed in large, bold, red serif letters. Below it, the date "OCTOBER 20, 2008" is printed in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The entire snippet is framed by a thick red border.

TIME
OCTOBER 20, 2008

"Such a visionary and large-scale program has only been possible because we've been able to get the media, civil society and corporate sector together," says Adeline Aubry, a former UNV program officer under whom the initiative was launched. India has had a long tradition of volunteerism, she says, "but Teach India gives them a giant common platform for a common cause."