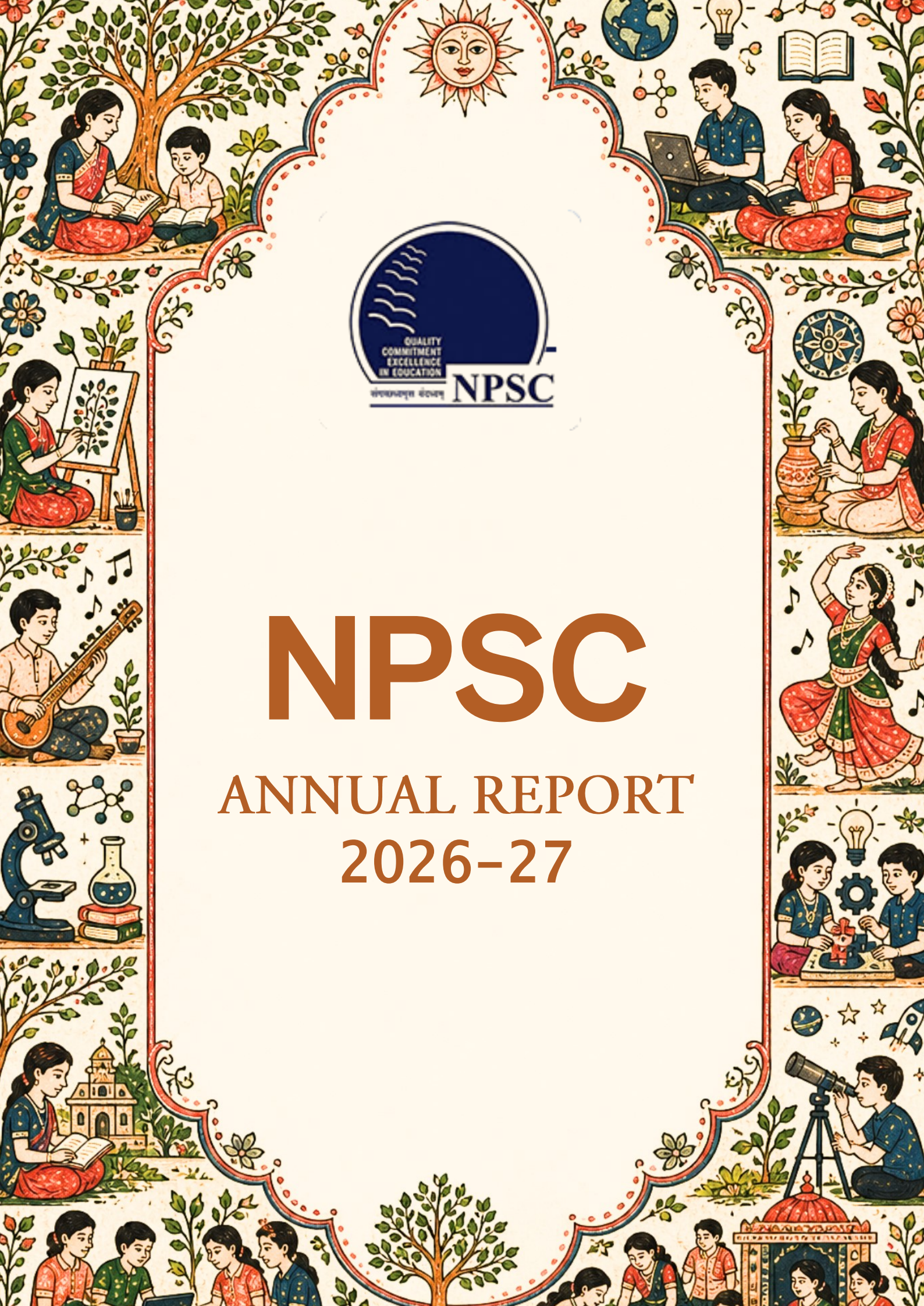




NPSC

ANNUAL REPORT 2026-27



INAUGURAL SESSION

The 53rd National Progressive Schools' Conference (NPSC) commenced on Thursday, 5 February 2026 centered on the theme **Reimagining the Skill Landscape**. The event brought together eminent educators, school leaders, and students, united by a shared commitment to shaping the future of education in a rapidly evolving world.

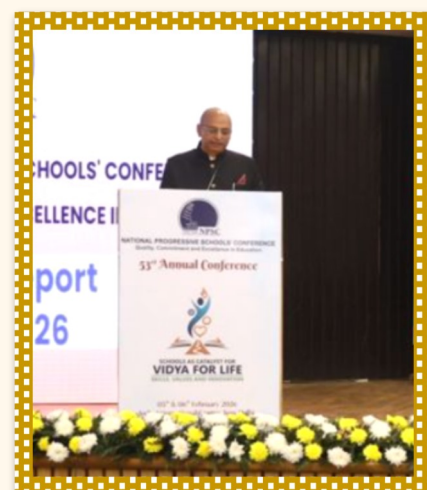
The day opened with a choral performance by the students of The Indian School, tiny but crucial young voices in educational discourse. **Ms. Mallika Preman**, Chairperson of NPSC and Principal of Tagore International School, East of Kailash, welcomed the distinguished guests, principals, teachers, and students present. She highlighted the significance of collective endeavour in



advancing educational excellence. Introducing the conference theme, she reflected on its urgency in the context of contemporary global shifts. She emphasised the strength of NPSC as a collaborative network of forward-looking institutions committed to sharing best practices and fostering innovation. Stressing the need to move beyond conventional academic frameworks, she

advocated for an education system that nurtures critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and digital fluency. She further described schools as dynamic ecosystems that prepare learners not merely for examinations, but for meaningful participation in life and the global workforce. She concluded by expressing her gratitude to the organising committee, participating institutions, and guests for their invaluable support.

The Annual Report was presented by **Mr. Sanjay Yadav**, Secretary of NPSC and Principal of Ahlcon International School. The report offered a comprehensive overview of the organisation's initiatives and achievements over the



preceding year. It highlighted the successful conduct of workshops, seminars, and collaborative programmes that strengthened inter-school engagement. Particular emphasis was placed on initiatives promoting skill development, digital literacy, and experiential learning. The report underscored the growing integration of competency-based education within school curricula and encouraged the adoption of project-based learning and progressive assessment practices. It also reflected on efforts to build meaningful partnerships with universities and industry, thereby aligning school education with real-world expectations. Teacher development remained a key focus, with numerous training programmes designed to equip educators as facilitators of skill-based learning. Platforms enabling students to demonstrate creativity, leadership, and problem-solving abilities were actively promoted, alongside participation in national and international forums. Looking ahead, the report outlined plans to expand collaborations, strengthen digital initiatives, and continue advancing the vision of reimagining the skill landscape.



The Chief Guest, **Mr. Pavan K. Varma, IFS, former Ambassador and Member of Parliament**, in his address, commended NPSC for consistently serving as a catalyst for progressive thought in education. Emphasising the importance of cultural rootedness, he urged educators to ensure that India's rich heritage remains integral to modern educational frameworks. He spoke of the need to nurture students who are not only globally competent but also

grounded in values, ethics, and a strong sense of identity. Highlighting critical thinking, adaptability, and creativity as essential attributes, he underscored the role of educators as architects of responsible and capable future citizens.

The keynote address was delivered by **Mr. Rahul Singh, IAS, Chairman of CBSE**, who spoke extensively on ongoing educational reforms. He outlined CBSE's efforts to redesign curricula in alignment with the demands of the 21st century, with a clear shift away from rote learning towards competency-based education. He emphasised the importance of embedding critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and digital



literacy into everyday teaching practices. Stressing the need to prepare students for both academic success and employability, he encouraged schools to cultivate resilience and adaptability. He also highlighted the growing role of technology in education and advocated for its thoughtful integration. Positioning these reforms within a global context, he noted the importance of aligning with international standards to enhance competitiveness. He concluded by reaffirming the pivotal role of teachers as mentors who guide students in discovering their strengths and applying knowledge meaningfully.



The ceremony also featured significant milestones, including the **release of the NPSC publication and calendar**, symbolising the organisation's ongoing initiatives and future direction. A moment of recognition followed, as **Ms. Asha Prabhakar**, former Chairperson of NPSC and Principal of Bal Bharti Public School, Noida, was felicitated for her distinguished contributions to the organisation and to the cause of education.



Dr. Vijay Datta, Vice Chairperson of NPSC and Principal of Modern School, Barakhamba Road proposed a Vote of Thanks expressing appreciation and gratitude to the Chief Guest, Mr. Pavan K. Varma, and the keynote speaker, Mr. Rahul Singh, for their thought-provoking insights and continued support. He acknowledged their perspectives on balancing tradition with contemporary skill demands and aligning education with future needs. He also recognised the leadership and dedication of Ms. Mallika Preman and Mr. Sanjay Yadav, whose efforts were instrumental in shaping the conference. Dr. Datta extended his gratitude to the students of The Indian School for their engaging opening performance and to Ms. Asha Prabhakar for her lasting contributions to NPSC. Concluding his address, he encouraged all participants to engage actively in the sessions ahead and reiterated the importance of collaboration and innovation in reimagining the skill landscape.



The inaugural day set a tone for the conference that was, at once, reflective

and forward looking, as also bringing into focus key priorities for education. Central to the discussions was the imperative of skill development in preparing students for a dynamic global economy. The need for educational innovation, through the integration of creativity, problem-solving, and digital literacy, was strongly emphasised. Equally significant was the role of collaboration, with NPSC reaffirmed as a vital platform for shared learning and collective progress. The day also served as a reminder of the importance of recognising leadership, honouring those who have contributed to the organisation's journey while inspiring new directions for the future.

The opening day of the conference effectively laid a strong foundation for meaningful dialogue and purposeful engagement, reflecting a shared vision of education that is both future-ready and deeply rooted in enduring values.

SESSION 1



The opening session featured an engaging panel discussion 'From Knowledge to Know-How: Repositioning Schools as Skill Ecosystems' moderated by **Dr. Ameeta Mulla Wattal**, Chairperson and Executive Director (Education), DLF Foundation Schools, with **Ms. Vibha Khosla**, Principal, Modern School, Vasant Vihar, serving as the rapporteur. The panel brought together distinguished voices in education and skill development, including **Prof. Shyam Menon**, Vice Chancellor, BML Munjal University; **Mr. Atul B. Bhatnagar**, Advisor at Board Level and Registered Mentor, SIIC; and **Ms. Smriti Sharma**, Programme Lead, Future Skills Initiative, Austrade. The discussion examined how schools can evolve to more effectively bridge academic learning with its practical application. Centred on the transition from knowledge acquisition to skill development, it underscored the need for institutions to function as dynamic environments where learning is actively applied, experienced, and contextualised.



Prof. Shyam Menon emphasised that schools must extend their role beyond the transmission of information. He underscored the value of experiential learning, noting that opportunities such as internships, community engagement, and project-based work enable students to translate theory into practice. Such approaches, he suggested, make learning more meaningful and prepare students to engage confidently with real-world situations.

Mr. Atul B. Bhatnagar drew attention to the constraints of conventional assessment systems. He advocated for evaluation methods that focus on demonstrated competencies rather than rote recall. According to him, qualities such as creativity, collaboration, adaptability, and problem-solving should form the basis of assessment. He also highlighted the importance of mentorship in helping students recognise their abilities and develop them effectively.



The discussion also brought into focus the significance of competency mapping as a means of personalising education. Identifying individual strengths and interests at an early stage allows schools to guide students along pathways aligned with their potential. Such an approach ensures that learning experiences are better suited to each student, supporting a more seamless progression into higher education and future careers.



Adding an international perspective, Ms. Smriti Sharma emphasised the importance of preparing students for a global environment. She pointed out that, alongside technical knowledge, skills such as adaptability and cross-cultural understanding are increasingly essential. She encouraged schools to build stronger connections with industry and explore international collaborations to broaden students' exposure and opportunities.

A shared viewpoint among the panelists was the changing role of educators. Teachers, it was noted, must increasingly act as facilitators and mentors who guide students in applying their learning in practical and creative ways, rather than simply delivering content.

The discussion reinforced several key ideas: the need to view schools as integrated spaces for developing knowledge, skills, and values; the

importance of embedding critical thinking, innovation, and digital literacy into everyday learning; and the value of partnerships with higher education institutions and industry to enhance employability. It also highlighted the importance of preparing students for global contexts while maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity, and of designing learning pathways that reflect individual strengths and aspirations.

Overall, the session offered a thoughtful perspective on how education can be reshaped to equip learners with the skills required to navigate a complex and rapidly changing world.

SESSION 2



The second session of the conference explored the enduring relevance of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) in contemporary education, highlighting its potential to make learning more meaningful and holistic. The engaging panel discussion themed and titled '**Making Learning Matter: Insights from the Indian Knowledge System (IKS)**', was guided by **Dr. Ashok Pandey**, Life Member, NPSC, while **Ms. Richa Sharma**, Principal, Ramjas International School, R.K. Puram, documented the proceedings as rapporteur.

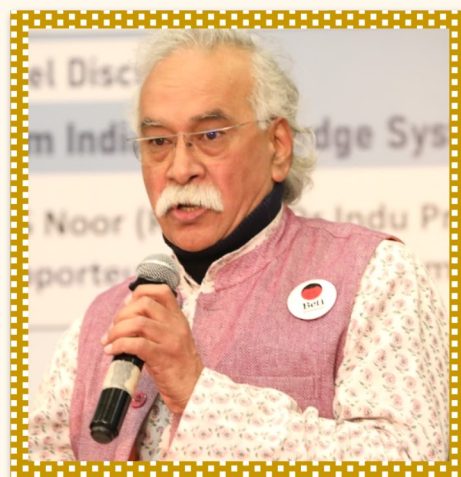
The panel featured distinguished speakers, including **Dr. Murari Jha**, Assistant Professor, SCERT Delhi; **Rear Admiral (Dr) K.S. Noor (Retd.)**, former Principal of the Indian Naval Academy; and **Dr. Indu Prakash Singh**, TEDx speaker, motivational speaker, poet, and author.

Dr. Murari Jha emphasised the importance of thoughtfully integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into school curricula. He drew attention to India's rich intellectual heritage across disciplines such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy, underscoring its continued relevance in shaping analytical thinking and ethical understanding. He noted that the inclusion of IKS not only deepens conceptual learning but also fosters a strong sense of cultural identity and intellectual curiosity.



Rear Admiral (Dr) K.S. Noor brought a distinctive perspective by drawing parallels between the rigour of naval training and the discipline required in education. He highlighted how values embedded within IKS—such as discipline, resilience, and leadership—are essential for the holistic development of learners. Emphasising the role of education in nation-building, he observed that integrating these principles helps cultivate character and a sense of responsibility among students.

Dr. Indu Prakash Singh offered a reflective dimension to the discussion by advocating for the inclusion of literature, poetry, and creative expression within the educational framework. He stressed the importance of nurturing emotional intelligence, empathy, and mindfulness, suggesting that these attributes are integral to well-rounded development. Positioning IKS as a comprehensive framework, he highlighted its capacity to support growth across intellectual, emotional, and spiritual domains.



The session brought forth several key insights. It reaffirmed that Indian Knowledge Systems provide a strong ethical and intellectual foundation for modern education, enabling a balanced approach to learning. The importance of holistic development; encompassing cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions; was strongly emphasised. The discussion also pointed to the need for curricular innovation through the inclusion of elements such as yoga, classical literature, traditional sciences, and philosophical thought. Importantly, it was noted that IKS aligns closely with essential future skills, including creativity, adaptability,

and resilience. The session concluded by recognising the global relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems, positioning them as valuable contributions to international educational discourse and as a means of establishing India as a thought leader in holistic education.

SESSION 3



The third session '**Shiksha Samvaad: Best Pedagogical Practices**' brought together a range of classroom practitioners on a collaborative platform to reflect on effective and evolving classroom tested pedagogical approaches.

The conversation was led by **Ms. Sadhana Bhalla**, former Chairperson of NPSC and Honorary Member, while **Ms. Anju Soni**, Principal, Shiv Nadar School, Noida, recorded the key deliberations. The panel comprised **Ms. Ritu Sharma**, PGT (English), ITL Public School; **Mrs. Ankita Juyal Balooni**, PGT (English), Gyan Bharati School, Saket; **Ms. Preeti Sharma**, PGT (History) and Head of the Department of Social Science, DAV Public School, Pushpanjali Enclave; and **Dr. Chandni Aggarwal**, PGT (Computer Science), Maharaja Agrasen Model School, Pitampura.

The session focused on practical, research-informed strategies that have been successfully implemented in classrooms. The speakers shared examples of innovative approaches, including the use of multilingual methods to foster inclusion, dialogue-driven teaching to deepen engagement, and reflective practices that encourage both teachers and students to think critically about the learning process.

A significant highlight was the integration of technology as a means to enrich, rather than dominate, classroom interactions. Dr. Chandni Aggarwal presented her work on the use of artificial intelligence to enhance student participation, demonstrating how digital tools can provide learners with more avenues to articulate their ideas and perspectives, thereby making classrooms more inclusive and interactive.



The discussion also emphasised the importance of placing students at the centre of the learning experience. Encouraging learners to take ownership of their educational journeys was identified as a key priority, alongside the need to introduce elements of global awareness and intercultural understanding at an early stage. Such approaches, the panel noted, help prepare students to navigate increasingly interconnected societies with confidence and sensitivity. Another important dimension explored was the role of pedagogy in addressing diversity within classrooms. The panel highlighted how inclusive strategies, particularly those rooted in empathy and linguistic diversity, can help bridge gaps and create equitable learning environments. The need to balance academic rigour with relevance and compassion was reiterated as essential to meaningful education.

The session also included a moment of recognition, as educators whose innovative classroom practices had been selected from a large pool of submissions across NPSC schools were felicitated. This acknowledgement underscored the value of sustained, thoughtful efforts by teachers and the importance of sharing such practices within the wider educational community.



The deliberations led to several key insights. It was observed that innovation in education does not always require complex interventions; even small, reflective adjustments can significantly enhance learning outcomes. The importance of dialogue among educators emerged as a powerful means of strengthening practice and enabling a culture of collaboration. The session reaffirmed that inclusive pedagogy ensures that every learner's voice is acknowledged and valued, and that technology, when used judiciously, can deepen engagement while preserving the human connection at the heart of education.

Presenter – Ms. Ritu

Multilingual Education: A Pedagogical Approach to Inclusive and Global Learning

Research Abstract and Keywords

This research evaluates the transformative potential of multilingual education as a strategic pedagogical framework that leverages linguistic diversity as a vital cognitive and socio-cultural resource. Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which mandates the use of mother tongue or local languages as the medium of primary instruction, this study examines how the integration of plurilingualism triggers a tectonic shift in academic performance and stakeholder mindsets. By fostering a deep-seated respect for pluralism, educational institutions can cultivate school ecosystems that are measurably more inclusive and significantly less prone to identity-based conflict. Utilizing a mixed-methodological approach, the paper demonstrates that multilingualism not only facilitates global readiness but also ensures students remain culturally rooted, ultimately resulting in "happier" classrooms. The findings underscore that the cognitive and social dividends of this approach provide a vital blueprint for 21st-century educational reform.



Introduction and Research Objectives

Language functions as the primary vehicle for human cognition, communication, and the preservation of cultural identity. It is the fundamental medium through which learners comprehend complex concepts, analyze their environment, and establish community connections. By cultivating proficiency across multiple linguistic systems, students enhance their intellectual plasticity, expand their intercultural awareness, and develop a robust respect for diversity—competencies that are non-negotiable for the contemporary global citizen. While

unmanaged linguistic differences can theoretically impede social cohesion, a strategic pedagogical commitment to multilingualism transforms these differences into instruments for national integration and humanistic development.

The primary objectives of this analytical study are:

- To evaluate the efficacy of multilingualism as a pedagogical tool for the holistic development of 21st-century learners.
- To quantify the cognitive and socio-emotional advantages inherent in multi-language and multi-cultural awareness.
- To demonstrate the critical role of multilingual frameworks in establishing inclusive, "happy and less conflict-prone classrooms."

Research Methodology and Scope

The study utilizes a "Mixed Research Methodology," synthesizing quantitative datasets with qualitative stakeholder insights to provide a high-resolution analysis of linguistic policy impact.

Area of Study

The empirical focus of this research was ITL Public School, a prominent educational institution in Delhi. The scope of the study encompassed a comprehensive sample including students, parents, and faculty across the primary, middle, and secondary divisions (Classes I-XII).

Data Collection Instrumentation:

Quantitative Tools: A series of structured questionnaires were administered to the school community to establish linguistic benchmarks, identify mother tongue prevalence, and gauge attitudes toward multilingual integration.

Qualitative Tools: Data was enriched through thematic analysis of expert opinions from educational stakeholders, open-ended administrative interviews regarding policy implementation, and longitudinal student case studies tracking academic and behavioral trajectories.

Literature Review: Theoretical Underpinnings

The research is anchored in the theoretical contributions of leading scholars in the field of linguistics and global education:

Jasone Cenoz: Advocates for a holistic rather than monolingual approach to education. Her research characterizes languages as fluid, interconnected systems, emphasizing the scientific and cognitive benefits of viewing multilingualism as a unified resource.

Dr. Lid King: Provides a critical distinction between "multilingualism" (societal diversity) and "plurilingualism" (the individual's repertoire). He analyzes the aspirational status of English as a global lingua franca and proposes policy shifts to balance English proficiency with indigenous linguistic preservation.

Gugulethu Jemaine Nyathi: Establishes a direct correlation between multilingual proficiency and the acquisition of global citizenship, framing linguistic diversity as a prerequisite for intercultural peace and international understanding.

Jessica Chandra: Contextualizes these global trends within the Indian landscape, examining the role of code-switching and the economic imperative of multilingual competence in a globalized marketplace.

Case Study: Implementation at ITL Public School

In March 2025, ITL Public School established a dedicated Multilingualism Implementation Committee to operationalize the mandates of NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023. The initiative commenced with a "Language Mapping" protocol to identify the linguistic heritage of the student body. The school adopted the "Three Language Formula" (designated as **R3**), providing a flexible framework where students engage with a third language through two dedicated periods per week. Over a 10-month implementation cycle, the school integrated the 22 Scheduled languages of India into its interdisciplinary curriculum. Furthermore, the school conducted workshops in **Indian Sign Language (ISL)** to cultivate empathy, sensitivity, and systemic inclusivity toward diverse abilities.

Geographic Zone	Languages Offered
North	Punjabi, Himachali
South	Telugu, Kannada
East	Assamese, Bengali
West	Marathi

Regional Language Offerings by Geographic Zone

- **Categorization of Multimodal Assessment Tools:** To measure progress beyond traditional testing, the school deployed diverse assessment modalities:
- **Performance-Based:** Dance Drama, Cultural Performance, Tableau, Song Composition.
- **Literary and Creative:** Debate, Quiz, "Weave a Story" (Folk Lores), Calligraphy, Vocabulary Games, Scrap Books, Short Video Production.
- **Experiential and Aesthetic:** Sustainable Fashion (Ramp Walk in Regional Attire), Utkal Diwas celebrations, and **Experiential Gastronomy** (Masterchef@ITL).

Data Analysis: Linguistic Diversity and Parental Goals

Linguistic mapping revealed a complex demographic tapestry. While **74%** of respondents identified Hindi as the primary household language, the school ecosystem reflects a hierarchy of regional representation:

1. Dominant Regional Languages: Punjabi and Haryanvi (reflecting Delhi's regional ties), followed by Rajasthani and Bhojpuri (linked to migration trends).

2. Minority Representation: Established enclaves of Bengali speakers (notably from areas like Chittaranjan Park), alongside smaller cohorts speaking Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Kannada, Assamese, and Urdu.

Parental Language Goals

- **English:** Prioritized for global knowledge acquisition and high-stakes career mobility.
- **Hindi:** Targeted for proficiency in government competitive examinations and national administrative contexts.
- **Regional Languages:** Valued for maintaining cultural connectedness and ancestral roots.
- **Foreign Languages:** Pursued as a strategic asset for international prospects.

Impact Assessment: Cognitive and Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Empirical data indicates that the shift toward multilingual pedagogy yielded substantial gains in both cognitive development and conflict mitigation.

Stage	Cognitive / Creativity Gains	SEL/Inclusion Outcomes	Conflict Reduction Metrics
Foundational / Preparatory	27% increase in cognitive skills; enhanced speech and language development.	Heightened multicultural acceptance; improved self awareness of strengths and values.	10% reduction in instances of conflict, name calling, and verbal aggression.
Middle/ Secondary	33% increase in cognitive skills; strengthened complex problem-solving abilities.	Mitigation of student isolation; stronger sense of belonging for cultural minorities.	20% reduction in identity-based bullying cases compared to previous cycles.

Implementation Challenges and Strategic Solutions

The transition to a plurilingual framework necessitated addressing specific stakeholder anxieties through strategic institutional responses.

Stakeholder Concerns:

- **Parental Anxiety:** Concerns regarding the "dilution of English" as a medium of instruction, perceived increases in student cognitive load, and the stress of additional evaluative requirements.
- **Faculty Challenges:** Difficulties in curricular integration, time-table management, and the design of standardized multimodal assessments for diverse learners.
- **Strategic Solutions**
- **Incremental Implementation Scaffolding:** Adopting a phased approach to build trust and avoid cognitive overload, emphasizing that "small wins" foster institutional comfort.
- **Strategic Pedagogical Integration:** Aligning multilingualism with existing curriculum goals to ensure it is not viewed as an "extra burden," but as a multidisciplinary tool.
- **Technological Leveraging:** Utilizing digital tools and AI to support language acquisition, ensuring teachers do not need to be polyglots to facilitate learning.

- **Professional Capacity Building:** Strengthening teacher confidence through specialized training in differentiated instruction and standardized evaluation of multimodal projects.

Conclusion: The 21st Century Imperative

Multilingual education is not merely a linguistic exercise but a fundamental requirement for 21st-century skill acquisition. This pedagogical shift transforms linguistic diversity from a perceived barrier into a significant academic asset. By moving toward a model of learning *through languages*, schools foster confident communicators and culturally grounded global citizens. While resource constraints and "rigid mindsets" remain hurdles, the empirical benefits; specifically the **27-33% cognitive gains** and the **marked reduction in identity based conflict**; clearly outweigh the logistical challenges. For educational institutions to remain future-ready and socially responsible, the adoption of a multilingual framework is a strategic imperative.

Presenter – Ms. Ankita

Comprehensive Report: The R.E.S.T. Pedagogical Framework in Modern Literature Education

Introduction to the R.E.S.T. Framework

In an era defined by rapid-fire information consumption and standardized metrics, the R.E.S.T. framework functions as a strategic intervention—a "slower, more humane pedagogy" designed to safeguard and activate youthful idealism. As pedagogical architects, we propose a shift that transitions the student from a passive recipient of data to an agent of ethical change. By leveraging literature's inherent ambiguity and plurality, this framework equips Generation Alpha to navigate complexity with a sophisticated moral compass. The framework is architected upon four foundational pillars:



- **Reflection:** The sophisticated mental reprocessing of knowledge and affect to achieve a deeper synthesis of complex social and personal realities.
- **Empathy:** The cultivation of critical empathy, moving beyond binary moral judgments to understand the systemic influences and power dynamics that shape human behavior.
- **Sustainability:** A paradigm shift that reclassifies ecological interdependence from a scientific data point to a fundamental moral imperative and human responsibility.
- **Transformative Teaching:** A pedagogical stance that reclaims the classroom as a site of active inquiry, where dialogue and collaborative meaning-making catalyze ethical agency.

Theoretical Foundations of R.E.S.T. Teaching

The transition from didactic instruction to R.E.S.T. is supported by a robust architecture of educational psychology and philosophy.

Theorist/Theory	Core Concept	Application to R.E.S.T.
Jean Piaget (Cognitive Development)	Knowledge is constructed through active	Provides the cognitive basis for "reprocessing" literary themes into internal ethical scaffolds and moral heuristics
Lev Vygotsky (Socio-cultural Perspective)	Learning occurs within the Zone of Proxim	Justifies the framework's emphasis on collaborative meaning-making, where teacher-student dialogue facilitates the development of agency
Louise Rosenblatt (Reader-Response Theory)	The "transaction" between reader and text;	Validates the "openness" of the R.E.S.T. model, allowing students to navigate multiple moral realities without being tethered to didactic
John Dewey	Education as life itself, rather than a	Positions the literature classroom as a living laboratory where students test ethical dilemmas and emotional truths in real
Paulo Freire	Conscientizaçã Critical Consciousness through reflection and dialogue	Drives the mission to transform youthful idealism into "mediated agency," emabsolutes and envision just futures powering students to question

Reflection: Mental Processing and Social Context

In the R.E.S.T. architecture, reflection is not merely a retrospective act but the "raw material" for constructing social awareness. "Reflection is a form of mental processing that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to gain a better understanding of relatively complicated ideas and is largely based on the reprocessing of knowledge, understanding and, possibly, emotions that we already possess." — Moon, J. (2005)

Literary Engagement with Social Margins

We utilize literature to allow students to navigate diverse "social locations." By interpreting these texts, students grant marginalized voices a mediated form of agency within the modern world.

- **Lost Spring:** Engages students with the lived experiences of those in systemic poverty, fostering a critical reprocessing of socio-economic inequities.
- **The Portrait of a Lady:** Facilitates intergenerational reflection, bridging the gap between evolving worldviews.
- **Discovering Tut: The Saga Continues:** Specifically used to problematize historical certainty and encourage reflection on how knowledge is constructed and controlled.
- **Father to Son and Childhood:** Serve as vehicles for reflecting on the inevitable transitions of the human experience and the loss of innocence. Note on Participatory Application: Beyond the text, we implement practices like **Youth Parliaments** to critically examine the Right to Education (RTE) Act, allowing students to apply their reflective insights to contemporary legal and social frameworks.

Empathy: Ethical Reasoning and Critical Awareness

The R.E.S.T. framework elevates empathy from "sentiment" to "critical empathy." This involves recognizing moral fallibility not as individual failure alone, but as a consequence of systemic deprivation and flawed power structures.

Thematic Grouping for Ethical Scaffolding

- **Emotional Literacy:** *My Mother at Sixty-Six* and *A Photograph* serve as primary texts for navigating the complexities of memory, loss, and the temporal nature of human relationships.

- **Ethical Reasoning in Crisis and Conflict:**
- *The Enemy and The Rattrap*: Push students toward nuanced moral choices in the face of conflict and vulnerability.
- *Birth and The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse*: Foreground human dignity, trust, and the survival instinct within specific social contexts. • *We're Not Afraid to Die...*: Cultivates resilience and collective strength during existential crises.
- **Critical Empathy & Power Dynamics:**
- *The Tiger King*: Exposes the marginalization of non-human lives and the catastrophic impact of human arrogance.
- *The Tale of Melon City*: Satirizes justice systems devoid of moral reasoning, forcing students to critique arbitrary governance and blind obedience.
- *On the Face of It and Memories of Childhood*: Confront learners with the intersection of identity, dignity, and systemic social justice.

Pedagogical Tools for Internalization

We employ a specific suite of instructional tools to ensure empathy is both experienced and internalised as a cognitive habit:

- Reflective questioning and perspective-taking exercises.
- Dialogic discussion and inclusive classroom scaffolding.
- Character mapping to interrogate the sum total of conditions shaping behavior.
- Alternative ending assignments to explore divergent moral outcomes.
- Personal response writing to bridge textual and lived experiences.

Sustainability: Ecological Interdependence through Literature We reimagine sustainability as a moral imperative. Our pedagogical design shifts the focus from "aesthetic appreciation" (viewing nature as an object of beauty) to "environmental responsibility" (viewing nature as a moral duty).

Literary Work	Ecological/	Pedagogical Transition
A Thing of Beauty / The Laburnum Top	Restorative power of nature and intrinsic value of biodiversity	From appreciation of beauty to recognizing ecological balance as vital for survival
The Voice of the Rain	Natural cycles and the interdependence of environmental processes	From observation of weather to respect for essential environmental systems
Journey to the End of the Earth	Climate change and human intervention in fragile ecosystems	From travel narrative to critical reflection on global co existence and impact
Silk Road	Sustainability within global, cultural, and historical contexts	From cultural exploration to a holistic understanding of future oriented practices

Pedagogies for Generation Alpha: Digital Integration

Generation Alpha are not "passive vessels" but active questioners who require "pedagogical mediators" to translate literary depth into their visual and interactive vernacular. Digital tools are not distractions; they are the instruments through which students distil the ambiguity of literature into meaningful narratives.

Digital Strategy Highlight

By integrating these tools, we empower students to act as "creators" of meaning rather than "consumers" of information:

- **Reel-making:** Students visually narrate complex themes like moral responsibility and ecological interdependence, requiring them to synthesize imagery with ethical messaging.
- **Podcasting:** This medium fosters collaborative inquiry and research-based discussion, allowing students to find and project their voices on issues of social justice.
- **Interactive Storytelling:** Encourages students to internalize literary ideas by

reinterpreting them through multiple forms of communication, strengthening both comprehension and self-awareness.

Conclusion: The Transformative Potential of Agency

The ultimate objective of the R.E.S.T. framework is the cultivation of "extraordinary" lives. Drawing inspiration from the pedagogical spirit of Mr. Keating in *Dead Poets Society*, we urge students to "seize the day" not through reckless impulse, but through informed, ethical reflection. By combining this humanistic ethos with modern digital practices, we transform the literature classroom into a vital space where students are empowered to envision—and ultimately enact—a more just, empathetic, and sustainable world.

Presenter – Ms. Preeti

Strategic Curricular Framework: The Early Diplomacy (ED) Club Initiative

Project Overview and Rationale

The Early Diplomacy (ED) Club is a specialized pedagogical intervention designed to institutionalize the development of international relations acumen within the school ecosystem. Utilizing the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)—the vanguard of India's foreign relations with 201 partner nations—as its foundational context, the initiative transitions diplomacy from an abstract concept into a functional curricular practice. The rationale distinguishes between diplomacy as a specific skill set refined through iterative practice and as a core competency required for heuristic self-regulation in sensitive, high-stakes global environments. The initiative focuses on the cultivation of three primary diplomatic capacities:



- **Articulated Communication:** Precision in the expression of national interests and strategic alignment.
- **Strategic Negotiation:** The ability to navigate complex bilateral interests to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.
- **Conflict Resolution and Management:** Advanced capability in de-escalating sensitive global situations and maintaining relational equilibrium.

Strategic Alignment with National Frameworks (NEP-2020 & NCF-2023)

The ED Club serves as a bridge between high-level educational mandates and classroom-level execution, fulfilling the following policy requirements:

- Policy/Framework
- Strategic Alignment & Curricular Integration

NEP-2020: Prioritizes holistic development and 21st-century skills to cultivate "Global Citizens" with a committed disposition toward human rights and international well-being.

NCF-2023: Operationalizes the "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" philosophy, empowering learners to engage in a free and fair interplay with the world through social engagement.

Social Science Aims (NCF-2023): Targets the understanding of global interdependence, specifically how systemic changes impact human societies and the critical need for cross-cultural collaboration.

Core Objectives of the ED Club

The club is architected to transition students from passive consumers of information to active agents of global discourse through these primary objectives:

1. **Development of Advanced Soft Skills:** Enhancing persuasion, empathetic communication, and critical inquiry through structured diplomatic simulations.
2. **Country-Specific Policy Research:** Generating comprehensive content and strategy profiles for India's 201 partner countries.
3. **Global Welfare Sensitization:** Engineering student-led responses to international humanitarian crises, fostering a culture of aid and solidarity.
4. **Ecological Diplomacy & Sustainability:** Utilizing the R.E.S.T. framework to promote responsible resource management (e.g., water diplomacy) and bilateral environmental agreements.
5. **Multimodal International Collaboration:** Establishing digital bridgeheads with international peer institutions to simulate real-time diplomatic exchanges.

Pedagogical Methodology for the Middle Stage

Targeting the Middle Stage (Grades VI–VIII), the methodology respects the developmental shift toward metacognitive reflection and heuristic self-learning.

Student-Centered Heuristic Model

The ED Club adopts a choice-based ownership model, ensuring students lead the inquiry process. This transitions the teacher from an instructor to a facilitator of student-led discovery.

Inquiry-Based Global Contextualization

Learners are engaged with real-world diplomatic challenges, moving beyond binary moral judgments to understand the systemic complexities of the transforming world order.

Primary Source Simulations and Activity-Based Learning

Curricular artifacts are used to anchor simulations in reality:

- **Model United Nations (MUN):** Formal procedural observations and participation.
- **Primary Source Simulations:** Direct engagement with "Sample Visas," official embassy communications, and External Affairs Ministry briefing videos.
- **Digital Summits:** Online cross-cultural exchange programs to practice live negotiation.

The "R.E.S.T." Framework and Youth Parliaments

Integrating **Reflection, Empathy, and Sustainability**, students utilize "Youth Parliament" techniques. These are adapted to simulate **International Summits** where students examine principles like the Right to Education (RTE) Act on a global scale, transforming youthful idealism into responsible ethical agency.

Integration of ICT and AI

Technological tools are deployed not merely as supplements but as **Pedagogical Mediators** that facilitate an inclusive classroom practice. The initiative prioritizes the development of a student-led **"ED App"** to manage bilateral data. Central to this is the use of AI voice tools like **ElevenLabs**, which allows students to convert researched scripts into professional narrations. This is a critical inclusive practice, providing autonomy to visually challenged students and building the confidence

of hesitant speakers through an "Inclusive Workflow" (Concept → Script → AI Voice → Video/Podcast Integration).

Tech Integration Snapshot: The initiative adopts the award-winning **"Brain Rot"** podcast format as a pedagogical reference model. By synthesizing the script-to audio workflow, students produce multimodal content—such as podcasts and reels—to analyze global ties and ecological interdependence, making complex diplomatic content accessible to Generation Alpha.

Outcomes and Educational Implications

The implementation phase demonstrates a definitive shift in the institutional and student-level landscape. **Student - Level Outcomes:**

- **Mindset Transformation:** A shift from "insulated" thinking to a deep understanding of global interdependence regarding national security and trade.
- **Career Aspiration Reorientation:** Increased student interest in pursuing roles within the **Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** and as **Embassy Officials**.
- **Skill Mastery:** Proficiency in navigating diverse perspectives and demonstrating advanced persuasion and conflict resolution. **Institutional Outcomes:**
- **Content Production:** Creation of specialized, interdisciplinary worksheets and presentations for over 200 countries.
- **Inclusion Benchmarks:** Successful engagement of shy and visually challenged learners via AI-mediated narration tools.
- **Educational Implications:** Given the transient and dynamic nature of foreign relations, this framework mandates that curriculum architects and educators remain continuously updated. It is essential to maintain an unbiased perspective on the transforming world order to prevent the delivery of stagnant geopolitical data.

Practical Application: Case Study (India-Italy Series)

The following task-list demonstrates the research-oriented approach to economic diplomacy and visual literacy utilized in the ED Club worksheets.

- **Visual Literacy & Brand Research:** Identify the logo for **Generali Central Insurance** and compose a brief analysis of the Italian brand **Benetton's** retail footprint in India.
- **Market Presence Inquiry:** Investigate the luxury market reach of **Tod's** and **Cavalli** within the Indian domestic sector.
- **Sectorial Diplomacy Study:** Analyze bilateral cooperation in the **Food & Food Processing** and insurance sectors.
- **Comparative Economic Analysis:** Compare the market valuations of Indian powerhouses against Italian counterparts:
- **Reliance Industries** (\$228B) vs. **UniCredit** (\$ 102B)
- **TCS** (\$150B) vs. **Ferrari** (\$ 85B)
- **HDFC Bank** (\$188B) vs. **Intesa Sanpaolo** (\$ 100B)

Conclusion and Future Outlook

The Early Diplomacy Club represents a high-impact, low-cost, and scalable model for integrating 21st-century competencies into the Middle Stage curriculum. By empowering students to script, narrate, and analyze the global stage through a STEM-integrated lens, the initiative ensures that education is both expressive and future-ready. **The Way Forward:** Expansion plans include the introduction of multilingual AI voice options to facilitate deeper international school exchanges and the integration of broader subject areas into the diplomatic framework. This initiative remains dedicated to the core vision of the STEM DLD/NCERT framework: ensuring every learner's voice is **heard, valued, and amplified**.

Presenter – Dr. Chandni

Comprehensive STEM Integration Report: AI, Engineering Workflows, and Digital Media in Modern Pedagogy

Pedagogical Foundation and Rationale

We are orchestrating a strategic shift in the modern classroom, moving away from stagnant, text-heavy instruction toward inclusive, technology-enabled environments as mandated by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

This transformation is anchored in the R.E.S.T. framework, which synergizes the humanities and STEM to foster ethical agency. By leveraging literature—a medium that uniquely embraces ambiguity and plurality—we provide the catalyst for students to question systems and construct a more humane world. Our pedagogical approach is grounded in **Piaget's theory of cognitive development**, emphasizing that students construct understanding through active engagement, and **Vygotsky's socio-cultural perspective**, which utilizes dialogue and scaffolding to bridge the "Zone of Proximal Development." This creates a state of *conscientização*, or *critical consciousness*, where learners evolve from passive recipients to active change-makers. *The R.E.S.T. framework is defined by four strategic pillars:*

- **Reflection:** As defined by Moon, J. (2005), this is a form of mental processing used to achieve a purpose or anticipated outcome, largely based on the reprocessing of existing knowledge and emotions to understand complex ideas.
- **Empathy:** The deployment of reflective questioning and perspective taking to bridge textual or scientific content with students' own emotional and ethical



frameworks.

- **Sustainability:** The cultivation of environmental consciousness and an understanding of ecological interdependence, treating sustainability as a moral and scientific imperative.
- **Teaching:** A humane pedagogy that prioritizes collaborative meaning making and transformative dialogue to awaken student idealism.

AI Voice Integration: "Amplifying Student Voice"

The implementation of ElevenLabs AI-powered voice tools serves as a critical pedagogical mediator. We have transitioned from teacher-modelled applications to a student-led production model, ensuring that technology acts as a buffer and amplifier for diverse learners

Teacher: Modelling voice-supported lessons, converting scripts into narrated audio for poetry (e.g. *The Voice of the Rain*), and explaining complex concepts to support auditory reinforcement.

Student: Acting as scriptwriters, narrators, and content curators.

Students manage the full production lifecycle, including **Ethical AI Use and Voice-Data Responsibility** to ensure respectful storytelling.

Engineering Thinking: The Pedagogical Workflow Model

The integration of AI voice tools is not a spontaneous creative act; rather, it represents a shift toward **rigorous, iterative design**. By adopting a systematic "Concept to Creation" workflow, students mirror engineering thinking through precise planning and logical sequencing.

1. **Topic Selection (Problem Identification):** Defining the scope of the inquiry or the specific social/scientific problem to be addressed.

2. **Research and Script Writing:** Synthesizing data into a structured narrative, ensuring a logical flow of information.

3. **Voice Generation using ElevenLabs AI:** Selecting appropriate vocal profiles to match the emotional or technical tone of the content.

4. **Audio Editing / Enhancement (Optional):** Iterating on the audio output to refine pacing and clarity.

5. **Visual Design (Canva or similar):** Creating professional-grade visual assets that complement the auditory data.

6. **Integration into Podcast / Video App:** Synthesizing disparate digital elements into a unified, functional prototype.

7. **Presentation / Sharing:** Deploying the final product on national platforms like YouTube or DIKSHA for peer review and public engagement.

Scientific Integration: Health, Mental Well-being, and Sustainability

STEM topics are explored through digital media to foster inquiry into complex human and natural systems. We utilize literature, such as *The Tiger King* (addressing environmental exploitation) and *The Voice of the Rain* (detailing natural cycles), to inform our scientific projects on ecological interdependence.

Project: Brain Rot

Core Objective: A high-impact educational podcast addressing digital overuse, emotional fatigue, and adolescent mental health. This project was recognized as the **"Best Audio Podcast" at the NCERT Audio Video Festival 2025**, serving as a national model for student-led digital advocacy.

Project: MenoCare

Core Objective: A voice-narrated awareness initiative addressing menopause and women's health. By exploring biological processes often marginalized in school settings, the project cultivates gender sensitivity and scientific literacy through empathetic storytelling.

Multi-Modal Digital Synthesis: Reels and Podcasts

For "Generation Alpha," multi-modal engagement is the primary language of interaction. These tools allow students to distil complex themes—including **vulnerability, responsibility, and interdependence**—into concise, meaningful narratives.

Traditional Didactic Approaches	Multi-Modal Digital Engagement
Students as passive	Students as active co-creators
Reliance on fixed conclusions and absolutes	Exploration of ambiguity, plurality, and critical inquiry
Heavy emphasis on text-based, one way delivery	Synthesis of visual, narrative, and digital elements.

Impact on Inclusivity and Student Engagement

This technology-enabled approach has significantly reduced the stigma associated with learning barriers, fostering autonomy among diverse student populations.

1. **Cognitive Accessibility and Retention:** AI-narrated content provides a permanent resource for self-paced listening, allowing students to revisit complex concepts and improving overall comprehension.
2. **Psychological Empowerment through "Distancing":** As seen in the **MenoCare** project, students used AI narration to "**distance personal discomfort from the topic.**" This technological buffer allowed them to approach sensitive health subjects with professional confidence and empathy.
3. **Educational Autonomy for the Visually Challenged:** The shift to narrated content empowered visually challenged learners to conduct **independent revision.** By removing the need for peer reliance, we have achieved a measurable increase in their classroom inclusion and agency.

Strategic Implementation: STEM Perspective and Values

This initiative explicitly categorizes educational activities through the four STEM components, ensuring a balanced integration of technical skill and ethical value.

- **Science:** Investigated through the lens of human biology, mental well being, and the study of ecological systems.
- **Technology:** Demonstrated through the authentic, ethical, and real-world application of ElevenLabs AI for inclusive communication.
- **Engineering:** Practiced through the rigorous planning, sequencing, and production of multi-step content workflows.
- **Math:** Integrated through the **logical reasoning** required for script structuring and the precise **design of content workflows.**

Reflections and Future Roadmap

Initial implementation challenges, such as device access and tool constraints, were successfully mitigated through peer-support networks and shared digital resources. To ensure national scalability and the continued evolution of this model, we have identified the following strategic objectives:

Way Forward

- **Capacity Building Programmes (CBP):** Launch dedicated training sessions via the NCERT YouTube channel to mentor educators in AI integration.
- **Scaling on DIKSHA:** Integrate student-produced podcasts and AI workflows into the national DIKSHA platform for wider accessibility.
- **Multilingual Expansion:** Utilize ElevenLabs' multilingual capabilities to support diverse linguistic backgrounds and regional languages.
- **Ethical Auditing:** Establish a permanent framework for monitoring ethical AI use and voice-data responsibility in student projects.

SESSION 4



The fourth session offered a refreshing exploration of creativity as an essential dimension of learning, centring on the transformative potential of storytelling and theatre. The session '**Katha Manch: From Play to Purpose: Fostering Creativity and Self-Expression**' was steered by **Ms. Asha Prabhakar**, former Chairperson, NPSC, and Principal, Bal Bharti Public School, Noida, and featured an engaging presentation by **Mr. Kuljeet Singh**, Founder and Creative Director of Atelier Theatre Group.

Mr. Kuljeet Singh introduced participants to the traditional art of **Dastan-e-Goī**, illustrating how storytelling, when enriched with expressive narration, voice modulation, and dramatic pauses, can transcend mere entertainment to become a powerful educational tool. His presentation demonstrated the

ability of stories to engage audiences emotionally while conveying complex ideas in an accessible and memorable manner.



Extending this perspective, he highlighted the role of theatre in education as a dynamic medium for fostering self-expression and creativity.

Through performance-based activities, students develop essential life skills such as collaboration, empathy, and effective communication. Theatre, he noted, creates a space where learners can explore ideas, experiment with perspectives, and build confidence in expressing themselves.

A central idea that emerged during the session was the reinterpretation of play as a meaningful and purposeful component of learning. Rather than being viewed as incidental, play was presented as a structured and impactful approach that supports intellectual and emotional development. Co-curricular engagements, in this context, were seen as vital avenues through which students discover their voice, imagination, and emotional depth.

Ms. Asha Prabhakar provided a broader context to the discussion by connecting the themes of storytelling and theatre with the larger vision of schools as skill ecosystems. She emphasised that creative practices are not peripheral but integral to academic growth, aligning closely with the objectives of holistic education as envisioned in contemporary educational frameworks, including the National Education Policy 2020.



The session underscored several important insights. It highlighted creativity as a critical skill that supports innovation and problem-solving. The role of performance-based learning in building confidence and self-awareness was strongly affirmed, alongside its contribution to emotional development, including empathy and resilience. Above all, the discussion reinforced the importance of integrating creative arts within the curriculum to ensure a balanced development of cognitive, emotional, and social competencies, thereby making education more engaging, inclusive, and meaningful.

The day concluded with a strong sense of purpose and intellectual enrichment, as all four sessions collectively articulated a forward-looking vision of education. The deliberations underscored the importance of innovation, inclusivity, and experiential learning, while inspiring educators to reflect and evolve in step with a changing landscape.

DAY-2

INAUGURAL SESSION

The second day of the National Progressive Schools Conference, held on Friday, 06 February 2026, aptly themed Vidya for Life: Schools as Catalysts for Skills, Values and Innovation, unfolded with a deliberate and reflective focus on the emotional, ethical, and social dimensions of schooling, and with a keen focus on educating the heart and the mind of each learner. The Inaugural Session commenced with a soulful performance by the school choir of Delhi Police Public School, Safdarjung Enclave, setting a contemplative and dignified tone for the proceedings that followed.



Graced by the presence of the Chief Guest, Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram and Chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, the session consciously moved away from procedural formalities and instead invited participants into a deeper engagement with the philosophical underpinnings of education. The opening reflections established a measured and thoughtful tone, encouraging educators to look beyond the mechanics of teaching and to consider the larger purpose and human dimensions of their work.

A clear distinction was drawn from the previous day's emphasis on skills and competencies, with the focus now shifting towards an inward engagement with the self. This reorientation framed the intellectual direction of the day, positioning education not merely as preparation for external realities, but as a process that shapes the internal world of the learner. Education, in this sense, was understood as a delicate balance between equipping individuals for the demands of the world and nurturing the inner capacities that define their responses to it.

Within this context, attention was drawn to the prevailing tendency in contemporary education to define success through measurable indicators such as grades, rankings, and outcomes. While these metrics were acknowledged as significant, the reflections underscored the necessity of consciously rebalancing priorities to include dimensions that are less visible yet fundamentally important—emotional intelligence, ethical grounding, and social awareness. These qualities, though not easily quantifiable, were recognised as central to the formation of individuals capable of thoughtful, empathetic, and responsible engagement with society.

The theme of educating both the heart and the mind was thus articulated as an essential imperative. Learning, it was emphasised, remained incomplete in the absence of humanity. Schools were envisioned not merely as centres of academic instruction, but as dynamic ecosystems in which character was formed, empathy was nurtured, and values were gradually internalised through lived experience. The most enduring outcomes of education were understood to lie not in visible achievements alone, but in the quieter transformations that shaped conscience, deepened understanding of others, and enabled meaningful human connections.

The reflections further engaged with the realities of a fast-paced and performance-driven environment, noting that such conditions often constrained opportunities for introspection and emotional growth. In response, the need for educators to cultivate attentiveness to the subtle processes of student development was strongly underscored. This required a fundamental shift in perspective—from the delivery of content to the shaping of character, and from the completion of syllabi to the cultivation of lives rooted in awareness, empathy, and integrity.

In its concluding emphasis, the session reaffirmed that education was not a transactional exchange of information, but a transformative process that shaped both intellect and identity. It called upon educators to embrace their roles not only as instructors, but as mentors and guides, entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing the inner and outer worlds of the learners in their care.



This reflective beginning was followed by the **keynote address delivered by Dr. Shashi Tharoor**, which offered a comprehensive and intellectually rich exploration of the purpose of education in a rapidly evolving global context. The address opened on a note of candour, with Dr. Tharoor acknowledging his

delayed arrival due to a recent injury. His presence, despite evident discomfort, conveyed a quiet but powerful message regarding the value of commitment to dialogue and the importance of engaging with educational discourse.

At the core of his address was a fundamental assertion that education forms the bedrock of civilisation. It is the foundation upon which societies build their intellectual, cultural, and economic progress. At the same time, he cautioned against reducing education to a narrow pathway defined solely by examinations and certifications. Drawing upon the Indian concept of *vidya*, he articulated a broader understanding of education as knowledge enriched by wisdom, values, and responsibility. In this conception, education is not confined to academic achievement but extends to the preparation of individuals for life in its fullest and most complex sense.



In examining the contemporary landscape, Dr. Tharoor highlighted a significant paradox. While access to information has expanded dramatically in recent years, the presence of wisdom and thoughtful understanding has not necessarily kept pace. The challenge for education, therefore, lies not in the dissemination of information, but in the cultivation of discernment. He emphasised the importance of encouraging critical thinking, adaptability, and curiosity, arguing that the true aim of education is not to instruct students on what to think, but to enable them to think independently and responsibly.

A substantial portion of the address was devoted to the future of work and the uncertainties it presents. Dr. Tharoor observed that a considerable number of professions that will define the coming decades have yet to emerge, while many existing roles are undergoing transformation or risk obsolescence due to technological advancements, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence. This reality, he argued, necessitates a fundamental shift in educational priorities.

Schools must prepare students not for fixed career trajectories, but for a lifetime of change and adaptation.

In this context, he identified a set of core competencies that are essential for navigating an unpredictable future. These included problem-

solving, communication, collaboration, adaptability, and independent thinking. He emphasised that such competencies cannot be acquired through memorisation, but must be cultivated through active engagement, discussion, and experiential learning.

Reflecting on the role of schools, Dr. Tharoor described them as living spaces where individuals learn not only academic content, but also the skills and dispositions required for participation in society. Within these environments, students learn how to interact with others, respond to success and failure, and engage with diversity. Many of these lessons, he noted, are absorbed implicitly through experience and observation, yet they leave a lasting impact on the individual.



Addressing school leaders, he emphasised their pivotal role in shaping the culture and ethos of educational institutions. Effective leadership, he argued, involves creating environments that are inclusive, supportive, and

conducive to inquiry. He stressed the importance of encouraging curiosity and questioning, cautioning that classrooms in which students are discouraged from asking questions fail to prepare them for the complexities of the real world. Leadership, in this sense, requires a commitment to nurturing openness, creativity, and continuous learning.

The address also devoted significant attention to the role of values within education. Dr. Tharoor cautioned that knowledge, when not guided by ethical considerations, can become misdirected. He emphasised the importance of cultivating values such as integrity, empathy, respect, and responsibility, noting that these are not transmitted through formal instruction alone. Rather, they are learned through everyday interactions, institutional practices, and the manner in which educators respond to challenges and conflicts within the school environment.

An illustrative anecdote concerning instances of discrimination among children served to highlight the manner in which biases are often acquired

outside the classroom but can and must be addressed within it. Schools, he argued, bear a responsibility to actively promote inclusion, challenge prejudice, and create environments in which all students feel valued and respected.

In addressing the theme of innovation, Dr. Tharoor offered a nuanced perspective, cautioning against equating innovation solely with technological advancement. He emphasised that meaningful innovation also lies in pedagogical practices that encourage inquiry, redesign assessment systems to prioritise understanding, and promote interdisciplinary approaches to learning. Technology, he noted, should serve as a tool to enhance education, but must not replace the human relationships and interactions that lie at its core.

Recognising the practical challenges faced by educational institutions, including infrastructural limitations and societal expectations, he observed that effective leadership is defined by the ability to navigate such constraints with clarity and purpose. He encouraged educators to engage parents as partners, support teachers in experimentation, and ensure that decision-making remains centred on the needs and development of students.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Tharoor situated education within the broader national context, observing that India's demographic profile presents both a significant opportunity and a profound responsibility. The effectiveness of the education system will determine whether this demographic advantage translates into national progress. Schools, he emphasised, represent the most critical investment in this future.

He concluded with a clear and enduring message that education must not be confined to preparing students for examinations, but must equip them for life in all its complexity. By nurturing skills, instilling values, and embracing thoughtful innovation, educators have the capacity to shape not only individual trajectories but the broader direction of society.

The session concluded with a formal vote of thanks that reflected both appreciation and considered engagement with the keynote address. The speaker acknowledged not only the intellectual substance of the address but also its distinctive



delivery, noting Dr. Tharoor's ability to combine clarity, elegance, and depth in his oratory. It was observed that the resonance of the address lay not merely in its content, but in the manner in which it was articulated, allowing its ideas to engage the audience meaningfully.

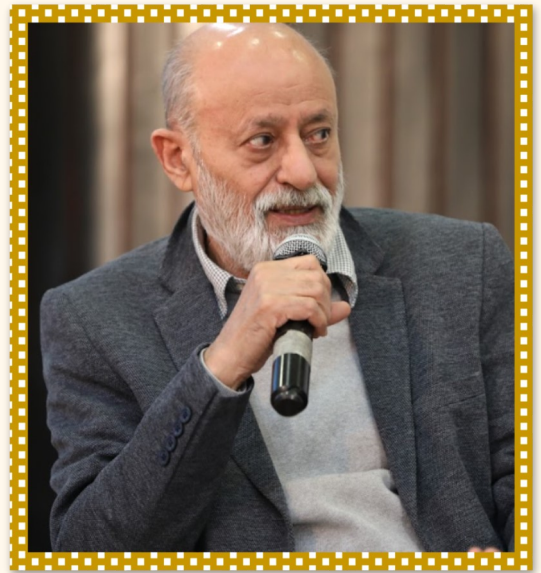
The concluding remarks emphasised that the keynote would endure not as a collection of memorable expressions, but as a body of ideas that would continue to inform reflection and practice. The session was described as one that enriched the conference through its thoughtful integration of language, insight, and perspective. The formal presentation of a token of appreciation followed, marking the close of the proceedings with dignity and a sense of collective purpose.

SESSION 5



The fifth session, titled **Beyond Rules and Rights: Education for Ethical Citizenship**, brought together diverse yet deeply interconnected perspectives on ethical citizenship, moral reasoning, and the role of education in shaping individuals who are not only competent but also conscious of their responsibilities towards society. In a world shaped not only by laws but by values, the discussion underscored that education must move beyond an understanding of rules and rights to nurture ethical judgment, empathy, and a sense of responsibility in every learner. It emphasised that true citizenship is formed when individuals recognise not just what they are entitled to, but what they owe to one another. The panel featured distinguished speakers including **Mr. Gauhar Raza**, Scientist, Poet and Columnist; **Mr. Samarth Pathak**, Communications and Advocacy Lead (South Asia) and Regional Focal Point (Education and Youth), UNODC; and **Lt. Gen Satish Dua**, Former Chief of Integrated Defence Staff. The session was moderated by **Ms. Amrita Burman**, Director, Sunbeam Group of Educational Institutions, and the proceedings were documented by the rapporteur, **Ms. Kanika Sachdeva Govi**, Principal, Delhi Public School, Rohini

Mr Gauhar Raza opened the deliberations with a reflective exploration of the role of literature and the arts in education. He began by drawing attention to a growing imbalance in contemporary educational priorities, where science, technology, and measurable outcomes increasingly dominate institutional focus, often at the cost of disciplines that engage with human experience in more nuanced ways. In such a context, he argued, literature assumes renewed significance, particularly if education is to nurture ethically aware individuals rather than merely skilled professionals.



He observed that formal education undertakes the ambitious task of compressing vast stretches of human knowledge and experience into the limited span of school years. Textbooks, however well designed, remain constrained in scope and intent. Their primary function is to prepare students for examinations, often reducing learning to comprehension and recall. While such an approach may produce individuals who are technically competent, it does not necessarily lead to the development of reflective thinking, empathy, or ethical awareness.

In contrast, literature and the arts, he noted, expand the horizon of human understanding. Through stories, poetry, and artistic expression, learners encounter multiple perspectives, complex moral situations, and emotional realities that extend beyond their immediate experience. Literature, in this sense, does not merely convey information but transforms perception. It invites introspection, stimulates imagination, and enables individuals to engage with lives and situations other than their own.

Mr. Raza drew attention to a paradox within contemporary education, particularly in the Indian context, where disciplines outside the sciences are often marginalised. Despite high levels of technical education, it is not uncommon to find individuals holding beliefs that stand in contradiction to scientific reasoning. This, he suggested, raises an important question regarding the nature of education itself: whether it has succeeded in cultivating a scientific temper or has merely produced technical proficiency.

He illustrated this concern through the teaching of fundamental scientific principles, such as Newton's law of gravitation. While students may memorise the formula, they are seldom encouraged to appreciate its universality or reflect upon its philosophical implications. The sense of wonder, humility, and deeper understanding that such knowledge can evoke often remains unexplored. Literature, he argued, bridges this gap by connecting knowledge with meaning and by providing space for reflection.

Importantly, he emphasised that literature allows for ambiguity, where ethical questions do not have predetermined answers. It creates opportunities for learners to grapple with complexity and to develop their own moral frameworks. However, he cautioned that the mere inclusion of literature in the curriculum is insufficient. What is required is a pedagogical shift in which classrooms become spaces that value pause, reflection, and dialogue. Students must be encouraged to articulate positions, engage with differing viewpoints, and think through ethical dilemmas.

He underscored the role of teachers in facilitating such an environment, noting that educators must resist the pressure to prioritise syllabus completion at the expense of deeper engagement. Equally significant, he observed, is the influence of the home environment, which may either reinforce or contradict the values introduced in school. Ethical citizenship, he concluded, cannot be imposed through instruction; it must be nurtured through sustained engagement. Literature and the arts contribute to this process not by prescribing answers, but by expanding the scope of inquiry and encouraging thoughtful response in a world that often demands immediacy.



The discussion was further enriched by the address of **Mr Samarth Pathak**, Representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, who examined the relationship between ethical citizenship and the rule of law. He began by observing that the rule of law is frequently understood in terms of compliance, where individuals adhere to rules primarily to avoid consequences. Such an understanding, he argued, is incomplete and insufficient for sustaining a just and stable society.

True adherence to the rule of law, he emphasised, requires the presence of ethical citizenship. This form of citizenship is not driven by fear of punishment, but by an awareness of how one's actions affect others. It represents an alignment between external regulation and internal conviction. Without this alignment, even well-designed legal frameworks risk losing their effectiveness.

Mr. Pathak drew attention to global concerns such as rising crime, violence, and social fragmentation, suggesting that many of these issues stem from a lack of ethical consideration in individual behaviour. Laws, he noted, cannot by themselves prevent wrongdoing if the values that underpin them are not internalised. For the rule of law to function effectively, it must be supported by ethical individuals at every stage, from the creation and enforcement of laws to their observance by citizens.

He highlighted a critical gap within educational settings, where rules are

often followed under supervision but may not be sustained in the absence of authority. This distinction between compliance and internalisation, he suggested, points to the need for a more holistic approach to ethical education.

Drawing upon his experience of working with young people across diverse contexts, he outlined several strategies that can support the development of ethical citizenship. He emphasised the importance of helping students connect with a sense of purpose by engaging with social issues that resonate with them. When learners identify with a cause, they are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility.

He further stressed the need for continuity in ethical learning, noting that isolated sessions are insufficient to bring about meaningful change. Ethical understanding must be embedded across subjects and sustained over time. The creation of safe spaces within schools was identified as another essential condition, enabling students to express themselves freely and seek guidance without fear.

Mr. Pathak also highlighted the importance of providing accurate information and mentorship, recognising that misinformation can be as harmful as ignorance. Equally significant is the validation of student agency. When young people are treated as active participants rather than passive recipients, they demonstrate initiative and ownership.

He illustrated this through examples, including the case of students with disabilities who, after participating in a programme, went on to establish a network advocating for inclusive classrooms. Such outcomes, he noted, are not the result of instruction alone, but of empowerment and trust. Similarly, when students are involved in decision-making processes within schools, they are more likely to take responsibility for outcomes.

In concluding his address, Mr. Pathak emphasised that ethical citizenship cannot be reduced to rule-following. It must be cultivated through participation, engagement, and a deep understanding of the principles that guide collective life.

The session then moved to the perspective of Lt **Gen Satish Dua**, Former Chief of Integrated Defence Staff, who offered a compelling account of ethics as it operates within the context of military leadership. He began by noting that ethics is often discussed in abstract terms, yet in operational environments it assumes immediate and practical significance, frequently involving decisions with



profound consequences.

Addressing a common misconception, he clarified that discipline within the armed forces does not equate to blind obedience. Rather, it is rooted in training, trust, and self-discipline. Soldiers operate in high-pressure environments where decisions must be taken swiftly, often under conditions of uncertainty and risk. In such situations, fear is a constant presence, and courage is understood not as its absence, but as the ability to act despite it.

He described the ethical dilemmas that arise in complex operational scenarios, such as those encountered during counterterrorism efforts. Situations in which adversaries use civilians as shields present difficult choices, where the decision to act or refrain carries significant moral implications. In such contexts, ethical judgement cannot be reduced to rigid rules but must be guided by purpose, context, and a deeply internalised moral compass.

He noted that this moral compass is shaped not through theoretical instruction alone, but through training, experience, reflection, and mentorship. The armed forces, in this regard, provide insights into how ethical reasoning can be developed through lived practice.

Lt Gen Dua also drew parallels with educational systems, particularly in relation to the concept of discipline. He emphasised that discipline should not be understood as enforced obedience, but as the development of self-control and responsibility. He highlighted the importance of participation and dialogue in decision-making processes, noting that leadership within the armed forces often involves consultation and the consideration of multiple perspectives. In reflecting on the contemporary context, he drew attention to the challenges posed by the rapid spread of information and misinformation. In an environment where responses are often immediate and unfiltered, the need for self-discipline and restraint becomes even more critical. Ethical responsibility, he suggested, must evolve in response to these changing conditions.



He concluded with a message that broadened the understanding of service, observing that contributing to the nation does not require participation in the armed forces alone. Individuals serve society by carrying out their roles with integrity and responsibility. Ethical citizenship, like effective leadership, involves choosing

what is right even when it is difficult.

Returning to the theme of ethical development, Mr. Gauhar Raza offered



further reflections on the role of questioning within education. He emphasised that the act of questioning lies at the heart of intellectual and ethical growth. To question is to engage actively with the world, to examine assumptions, and to seek understanding beyond surface appearances.

He observed that both educational institutions and social environments often discourage questioning, whether through rigid curricular structures or through cultural expectations that prioritise conformity. Over time, this leads to hesitation and a reluctance to challenge established norms or authority.

This suppression of inquiry, he argued, has significant ethical implications. Without the capacity to question, individuals may fail to recognise injustice or feel unable to respond to it. The phenomenon of passive observation in the face of wrongdoing reflects this absence of moral engagement.

He further noted that ethical frameworks are not fixed or universal, but shaped by context. Actions that may be considered acceptable in one setting may be viewed differently in another. This raises important questions regarding the extent to which education prepares students to navigate such complexities.

Modern educational environments, he observed, often emphasise competition over collaboration, encouraging individuals to prioritise personal success. In such contexts, ethical considerations may become secondary, and boundaries between right and expedient action may become blurred.

To address this, he called for a reorientation of educational practice towards creating spaces where students can engage with moral questions, consider diverse perspectives, and develop their own positions. He emphasised that the value lies not in conformity to a single viewpoint, but in the process of reasoning and reflection.

He also highlighted the shared responsibility of educators and families in cultivating such an environment. Dialogue, example, and meaningful engagement were identified as essential elements in developing ethical awareness. Ethical courage, he concluded, is not defined by confrontation, but by conviction, and begins with the willingness to question.

Taken together, the deliberations of the session underscored the centrality of ethics within education and the need to move beyond formal instruction towards deeper engagement with values, reflection, and human experience. The session presented a compelling case for education that prepares individuals not only to succeed, but to act with awareness, responsibility, and integrity in an increasingly complex world.

SESSION 6



The sixth session engaged with the urgent and increasingly complex question of emotional well-being within educational spaces, bringing together perspectives that collectively underscored the need for systemic, sustained, and deeply human-centred approaches to schooling. The session, titled **Well-being and Balance: Towards Emotionally Intelligent Schools**, was moderated by **Dr. Sudha Acharya**, Ex-Chairperson, NPSC and Principal, ITL Public School, Dwarka, and the proceedings were meticulously documented by the rapporteur, **Mr. Srinivasan Sriram**, Principal, The Mann School. The distinguished panel of speakers comprised **Padma Shri Dr. Uma Tuli**, Founder, Amar Jyoti Charitable Trust; **Dr. Sunil Mittal**, Senior Psychiatrist at Cosmos Institute of Mental Health & Behavioural Sciences; and **Ms. Sarita Jadav**, National Programme Officer, UNESCO.

The deliberations moved beyond theoretical articulation and focused on the lived realities of children and educators, examining how schools might respond to emerging emotional challenges with clarity, responsibility, and institutional commitment. Across the session, a shared concern emerged regarding the changing emotional landscape of childhood and adolescence, marked by rising anxiety, identity-related struggles, performance pressures, and

increasing instances of social and psychological distress. These concerns were not viewed in isolation, but as indicators of deeper systemic gaps within educational structures and societal expectations.

Dr. Sunil Mittal, initiated the session with a comprehensive and evidence-



based exploration of the emotional landscape of contemporary schooling. He began by situating schools as the most enduring and influential emotional environments in a child's life outside the family. This positioning, he emphasised, confers upon educational institutions a responsibility that extends well beyond academic instruction, requiring them to actively contribute to the development of emotional resilience, self-awareness, and psychological well-being.

Drawing attention to what he described as a "silent and escalating crisis," Dr. Mittal identified a range of concerning trends observable across age groups within schools. These included the early onset of emotional suppression, the increasing tendency to link self-worth with academic performance, identity related confusion during adolescence, and the prevalence of bullying and cyber aggression. He further noted the growing incidence of anxiety, depressive tendencies, and behaviours associated with self-harm. Importantly, he cautioned against interpreting such manifestations as mere disciplinary concerns, asserting instead that they are often expressions of unarticulated emotional distress.

A critical concern raised in his address was the pervasive tendency within education systems to equate achievement with personal worth. In environments where marks become the dominant measure of value, failure is perceived as unacceptable, curiosity is replaced by fear, and learning becomes transactional in nature. Dr. Mittal advocated for a reorientation of this paradigm, urging schools to recognise effort, perseverance, and growth as equally significant indicators of development.

In addressing the concept of mindfulness, he offered a nuanced clarification, distinguishing it from popular misconceptions that reduce it to silence or meditative practice alone. He defined mindfulness as the capacity to remain aware of one's thoughts and emotions without judgement or alarm. Elaborating on its developmental dimensions, he outlined how this awareness may be cultivated progressively: through sensory awareness in the primary years, emotional recognition during middle school, and metacognitive understanding in senior classes. He emphasised that mindfulness is not an isolated

subject to be introduced into the timetable, but a way of engaging with daily experiences that must be integrated into the fabric of school life.

Dr. Mittal further demonstrated how emotional intelligence may be meaningfully embedded within existing curricular structures. Literature classes, he noted, provide opportunities to explore emotional complexity through characters and narratives; science enables understanding of physiological aspects of stress and well-being; sports create contexts for managing success and failure; and social sciences facilitate engagement with ethical reasoning and empathy. In addition to curricular integration, he stressed the importance of normalising help-seeking behaviour, providing emotional support during periods of stress, and establishing referral systems for professional intervention where required.

Citing data that indicates that between fifteen to twenty-five per cent of children require some form of mental health support, he underscored the urgency of adopting proactive rather than reactive approaches. In conclusion, he described the characteristics of emotionally responsive schools as those that enable children to identify and articulate their emotions, encourage self regulation rather than suppression, and create environments that challenge learners without overwhelming them. His address called for a fundamental shift in educational orientation, from control to connection, from externally imposed discipline to internal awareness, and from performance-driven systems to holistic development.

The session was further enriched by the address of **Ms. Sarita Jadav**, associated with UNESCO, who examined the question of well-being from a policy and implementation perspective. She began by situating the discussion within the demographic reality of India, with its vast adolescent population, and posed a direct and compelling question regarding the role of schools as primary sites for the development of well-being.

Ms. Jadav observed a significant shift in the emotional vocabulary of children, noting that terms such as stress, depression, and panic have entered everyday discourse at increasingly younger ages. She highlighted instances where relatively minor changes in school environments provoke disproportionate emotional responses, suggesting not individual fragility but systemic strain.

While acknowledging the presence of robust policy frameworks at both national and international levels, including guidelines developed by UNESCO, the National Education Policy 2020, and the School Health and Wellness Programme,



she pointed to a persistent gap between policy formulation and on-ground implementation. She observed that while frameworks are often comprehensive, their translation into practice remains uneven and inconsistent across institutions.

Emphasising the centrality of well-being to educational outcomes, Ms. Jadav outlined the consequences of neglecting mental health within schools. These include declining academic performance, increased absenteeism and dropout rates, the prevalence of bullying and violence, teacher burnout, and long-term societal challenges such as substance dependency and unemployment. She argued that well-being must be understood not as a supplementary concern, but as a foundational dimension of education.

Drawing upon the whole-school approach advocated by UNESCO, she outlined key components required for effective integration. These included embedding well-being across the curriculum rather than treating it as a separate activity, allocating dedicated time for structured engagement with issues such as mental health, physical health, gender sensitivity, safety, digital awareness, and citizenship, and recognising the well-being of teachers as integral to the overall health of the institution.

She also addressed the necessity of creating safe and supportive school environments, drawing attention to serious concerns such as student dropout linked to bullying, instances of exploitation, and cases of abuse within educational settings. Safety, she emphasised, must be intentionally designed into institutional systems rather than assumed.

Another critical aspect of her address was the need for monitoring and accountability. She stressed that educational systems must track well-being indicators with the same rigour as academic outcomes, noting that institutional priorities are often reflected in what is measured.

In her concluding observations, Ms. Jadav cautioned against reducing well-being to isolated practices such as yoga sessions or occasional activities. Instead, she defined it as a core educational outcome, integral to the development of individuals who are capable of learning effectively, remaining engaged in school, and contributing meaningfully to society. Her address called for a shift in institutional perspective from the delivery of subjects to the development of human beings.

Dr. Uma Tuli, Founder Chairperson of the Amar Jyoti Charitable Trust, offered a deeply personal and principled perspective on inclusion as the foundation of emotional well-being. Drawing upon her extensive work in the field of inclusive education, she began by asserting that inclusion is not merely an instructional strategy, but a moral and emotional necessity that underpins all meaningful educational practice.



She shared the personal experiences that shaped her commitment to this cause, recounting the challenges faced by her brother, who encountered systemic barriers including lack of access to assistive devices, denial of school admissions, and social exclusion. These experiences, she noted, revealed the extent to which existing systems marginalised individuals with disabilities and motivated her to work towards more equitable and inclusive frameworks.

Dr. Tuli emphasised the need to move beyond symbolic representations of inclusion, clarifying that the presence of a small number of children with disabilities within mainstream classrooms does not constitute genuine inclusion. Instead, she advocated for equitable representation, early integration beginning at the foundational stage, and the full participation of all learners in academic and co-curricular activities.

A significant aspect of her address involved reframing the discourse around disability. She urged educators to move away from deficit-oriented terminology and instead recognise and nurture the abilities inherent in every child. Education, she argued, must extend beyond academic achievement to include engagement with sports, arts, and vocational skills, thereby enabling the holistic development of all learners.

She outlined the structural and institutional requirements necessary to support inclusive education, including accessible infrastructure such as ramps and transport facilities, the availability of assistive technologies, flexible curricular frameworks, and the presence of both specialised and sensitised educators. She emphasised that inclusion cannot be the responsibility of a limited group of specialists, but must be embraced as a collective commitment across the entire school community.

In defining the role of teachers within such environments, Dr. Tuli articulated a framework that characterised educators as tolerant, efficient, affectionate, creative, honest, continually evolving, and committed to reform. This conceptualisation underscored the importance of both professional

competence and personal disposition in creating inclusive and emotionally supportive classrooms.

She further highlighted the reciprocal relationship between inclusion and emotional well-being. Inclusive environments, she noted, not only support children with diverse needs but also cultivate empathy, mutual respect, and social understanding among all learners. Such environments reduce isolation, strengthen emotional resilience, and contribute to the development of balanced and compassionate individuals.

Her concluding remarks reiterated that emotional well-being cannot be achieved in the absence of acceptance, accessibility, and equality. Inclusion, she affirmed, is not an additional component of education, but its very foundation.

Taken together, the deliberations of the session presented a coherent and compelling vision of schooling as an emotionally responsive, inclusive, and ethically grounded enterprise. Across the contributions of Dr. Sunil Mittal, Ms. Sarita Jadav, and Dr. Uma Tuli, a consistent emphasis emerged on the need to move beyond fragmented interventions towards systemic transformation. The session underscored that emotional well-being is not optional, that inclusion is indispensable, and that policy frameworks must be accompanied by sustained and meaningful implementation. In doing so, it reaffirmed the fundamental purpose of education as the preparation of individuals not merely for academic success, but for a life of balance, dignity, and responsible participation in society.



SESSION 7



The seventh session curated on a pertinent discussion **In Conversation – From Policy to Practice: Creating Future-Ready Schools**, presented a substantive and layered examination of the future of education in India, bringing into dialogue the perspectives of **Prof. C. Raj Kumar**, Founding Vice Chancellor of O. P. Jindal Global University, and **Mr. Rajdeep Sardesai**, Senior Journalist and Author at India Today. Centred on aligning skill and sensibility with national frameworks such as NEP 2020 and the SDGs, the session also highlighted the importance of collaborative models that meaningfully link schools, communities, and industry. Marked by both conceptual clarity and grounded realism, the discussion engaged with the critical task of translating policy vision into effective educational practice within a complex and diverse national context. The conversation was introduced by **Ms. Lata Vaidyanathan**, Director, Gyan Bharti Public School, Saket, and the proceedings were documented by the rapporteur, **Dr. Neetu Kapoor**, Principal, Army Public School, Delhi Cantt



Prof. C. Raj Kumar opened the deliberations with a comprehensive analysis of the current state and future trajectory of India's education system. He situated his remarks within the broader framework of recent policy developments, particularly the National Education Policy 2020, which he described as an ambitious and forward-looking articulation of reform. However, he emphasised that the true measure of such policy frameworks lies not in their vision, but in their implementation within classrooms

and institutions across the country.

A central theme of his address was the need to move beyond rigid disciplinary boundaries that have historically characterised formal education. He argued that traditional models, which compartmentalise knowledge into isolated subjects, are increasingly inadequate in a world defined by complexity and interdependence. In their place, he advocated for a multidisciplinary approach that enables learners to engage with multiple domains simultaneously and to draw meaningful connections across fields of knowledge. Such an approach, he noted, allows students to pursue diverse interests with equal seriousness, whether in the sciences, the arts, or other areas, thereby preparing them for a future that demands both depth and breadth of understanding.

In addressing the widely invoked concept of critical thinking, Prof. Kumar cautioned against its superficial incorporation into educational discourse. He observed that the term has often been reduced to a rhetorical device, without corresponding changes in classroom practice. Genuine critical thinking, he argued, requires a transformation of the learning environment into one that encourages questioning, debate, and intellectual risk-taking. Students must be enabled to engage with ideas critically, to examine differing perspectives, and to move beyond the comfort of predetermined answers. Without such cultural shifts, the invocation of critical thinking risks remaining aspirational rather than substantive.

A significant portion of his address was devoted to the persistent gap between policy intent and institutional reality. Despite progressive frameworks, he noted that many schools across India continue to face structural challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, shortages of trained teachers, and unsatisfactory learning outcomes. He drew attention to evidence indicating that students in higher grades often lack foundational competencies, underscoring the limitations of policy reform in the absence of effective governance and sustained investment. In this regard, he emphasised the necessity of increasing public expenditure on education and strengthening systems of accountability to ensure that policy commitments translate into tangible improvements.

Prof. Kumar also offered a critical re-examination of the purpose of education, challenging the prevailing tendency to equate it primarily with employment outcomes. He proposed instead that education should be understood as a lifelong process, one that equips individuals not only for existing professions but also for roles that may emerge in an uncertain future. This requires cultivating adaptability, curiosity, and the capacity for continuous learning, rather than focusing narrowly on immediate employability.

The discussion of emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, formed another important dimension of his address. While acknowledging

the transformative potential of such technologies, he warned against unreflective or indiscriminate adoption. He emphasised the importance of integrating artificial intelligence into education in a thoughtful and ethical manner, with due attention to issues of privacy, governance, and equity. He further cautioned that excessive reliance on technological tools may undermine the development of independent thinking, suggesting that the true challenge lies not in the presence of technology, but in its appropriate use.

India's deeply entrenched examination culture was also subjected to critical scrutiny. Prof. Kumar observed that the current system places disproportionate emphasis on high-stakes testing, encouraging memorisation and performance oriented learning while generating significant psychological pressure among students. He called for a substantial reduction in excessive testing and advocated for assessment practices that prioritise understanding, application, and intellectual engagement over rote recall.

In examining access to higher education, he highlighted the structural imbalance between demand and supply, noting that India's Gross Enrollment Ratio remains relatively low in comparison to its population. This imbalance has led to intense competition for limited seats in quality institutions, often reflected in exceptionally high cut-off marks and the increasing trend of students seeking education abroad. Addressing this challenge, he emphasised the need to expand the number of institutions while simultaneously ensuring quality, as well as leveraging technology to enhance access at scale.



The question of vocational education and skill development was also addressed with particular emphasis. Prof. Kumar pointed to the persistent social stigma associated with non-degree pathways in India, which has hindered the development of a robust vocational ecosystem. Drawing comparisons with international models, he argued for the establishment of high-quality skill institutions, closer alignment between training and industry requirements, and a broader societal recognition of diverse career trajectories.

Beyond structural and curricular considerations, he underscored the importance of education in shaping informed and responsible citizens. Initiatives that promote constitutional awareness, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement were identified as essential components of schooling. However, he emphasised that values cannot be imposed through instruction; they must be explored through dialogue, debate, and reflection, allowing students to internalise them meaningfully.

In his concluding observations, Prof. Kumar offered two clear imperatives for schools: to reduce the excessive emphasis on testing and to dismantle rigid disciplinary boundaries. These, he suggested, are necessary steps if education is to respond effectively to the demands of a rapidly changing and uncertain world.



The session was complemented by the reflections of Mr. Rajdeep Sardesai, whose perspective brought a critical and grounded dimension to the discussion. Drawing upon his extensive experience as a journalist observing India's socio political landscape, he began by reflecting on the proliferation of terminology within contemporary educational discourse. Terms such as "future-ready," "critical thinking," and "technology-enabled learning," he noted, have become commonplace, yet there remains a lack of clarity regarding their actual impact on classroom practice. He posed a fundamental question that anchored his address: to what extent are these ideas translating into meaningful

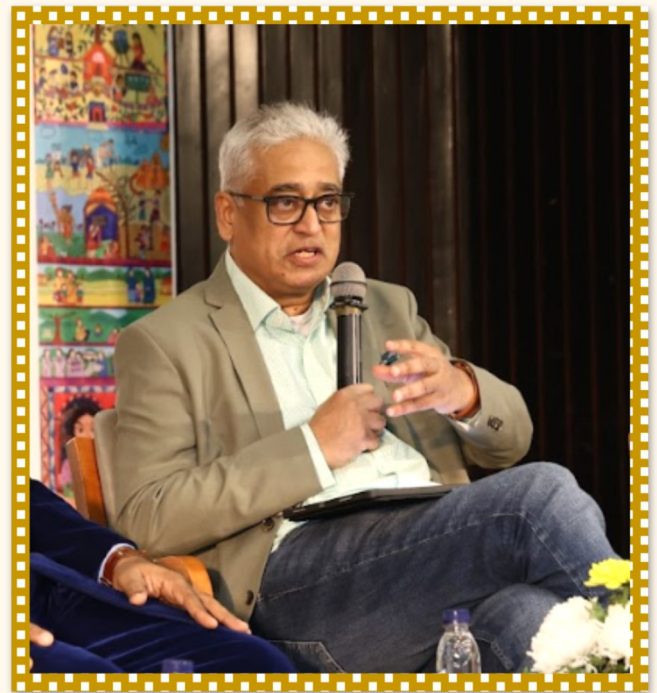
change within schools? In responding to this question, he drew upon observations from his travels across different regions of the country, highlighting persistent challenges at the ground level. These included inadequate infrastructure, gaps in foundational literacy and numeracy, and issues such as teacher absenteeism. In such contexts, he suggested, discussions on advanced pedagogical approaches or technological integration risk appearing disconnected from immediate realities.

Mr. Sardesai's critique extended to the examination-oriented nature of the education system, which he described as one of its most entrenched features. Students, he observed, are subjected to intense pressure to perform in competitive examinations, often dedicating years to preparation that is narrowly focused on test outcomes. This emphasis, he noted, places considerable emotional and psychological strain on learners, while reinforcing a definition of success that is limited to examination results. Drawing upon his personal experiences as a parent, he illustrated the depth to which this system is embedded within societal expectations.

He also addressed the structural imbalance between the number of students seeking education and the availability of quality institutions, identifying this as a central challenge within the system. The resulting competition, reflected in extremely high cut-off marks and limited opportunities, raises questions

about the capacity of existing frameworks to accommodate the aspirations of a large and diverse student population. He questioned whether policy initiatives alone can resolve this imbalance without significant expansion of institutional capacity.

In considering the role of technology, particularly artificial intelligence, Mr. Sardesai acknowledged its potential to transform learning processes. At the same time, he raised important concerns regarding the preparedness of schools and teachers to integrate such technologies effectively. He cautioned that without adequate systemic readiness; technological interventions may exacerbate existing inequalities rather than alleviate them.



Amid these structural critiques, he introduced a deeply human perspective on education, reflecting on his mother's lifelong commitment to teaching. Her continued engagement with education well into advanced age, he noted, exemplifies the dedication and passion that underpin meaningful teaching. This reflection served to remind the audience that beyond systems and policies, education remains fundamentally a human endeavour, shaped by the commitment of individuals.

Mr. Sardesai concluded by emphasising the importance of honest and open dialogue in addressing the challenges facing education. Progress, he suggested, depends on the willingness to acknowledge uncomfortable realities, to engage in critical discussion, and to move beyond rhetorical formulations. While recognising the potential for transformation, he underscored that meaningful change requires alignment between policy, infrastructure, and practice.

The session, through the complementary perspectives of Prof. C. Raj Kumar and Mr. Rajdeep Sardesai, presented a comprehensive view of the opportunities and challenges inherent in India's educational landscape. It highlighted the necessity of bridging the gap between vision and implementation, of grounding reform in institutional realities, and of sustaining a commitment to both intellectual and human development. In doing so, it reaffirmed that the future of education will depend not only on the articulation of ideas, but on their careful, consistent, and contextually responsive enactment.

SESSION 8



A deeply evocative and immersive artistic experience was presented through **Mystic Land: Educating the Heart, Awakening the Mind, a contemporary dance production by Santosh Nair Academy - Sadhya**. Moving beyond conventional academic discourse, the session underscored the transformative power of the arts as a medium of learning, reflection, and emotional awakening.



Titled **The Mystical Forest** the performance explored life within the forest as a metaphor for interconnected existence, drawing attention to the delicate balance between human beings, nature, and the unseen rhythms that sustain life. Rooted in the rich tradition of **Mayurbhanj Chhau**, a classical dance form from Odisha, the production seamlessly blended strong, grounded

movements with contemporary interpretation. This synthesis created a powerful visual language that communicated both the physicality and the philosophical depth of the narrative.

Through a series of choreographed sequences, the dancers portrayed the varied experiences of forest life; its rituals, relationships, struggles, and celebrations. Emotions were expressed not merely as individual states but as collective energies, reflecting harmony, conflict, coexistence, and renewal. The performance invited the audience to engage not just as observers but as participants in a shared emotional and sensory journey, prompting reflection on themes of sustainability, empathy, and the intrinsic connection between all living beings.

The session stood as a reminder that education extends beyond intellectual inquiry to include the cultivation of sensitivity, imagination, and ethical awareness. By integrating artistic expression into the conference, Mystic Land reinforced the idea that the arts play a vital role in 'educating the heart' while simultaneously 'awakening the mind.'



The proceedings of the session were thoughtfully documented by the rapporteur, **Sr. Mallika**, Principal, Holy Child Senior Secondary School, whose observations captured the essence and impact of this unique and enriching experience.

VALEDICTORY SESSION: A REFLECTIVE AND FITTING CULMINATION

The Valedictory session of the 53rd National Progressive Schools Conference marked a meaningful conclusion to two days of rich intellectual engagement, collaboration, and reflection.

Conceived as a moment to pause, consolidate learning, and carry forward the ideas that had shaped the discourse, the session brought together recognition, reflection, and renewed purpose in equal measure. It was ably moderated by **Ms. Aditi Misra**, Director Principal, Delhi Public School, Sector 45, Gurugram, whose poised and engaging presence lent both clarity and warmth to the proceedings.



The highlight of the session was the keynote address delivered by **Mr. Himanshu Gupta**, IAS & Secretary, CBSE, whose presence was warmly acknowledged despite his demanding schedule. In an address that combined insight with accessibility, he reflected on the evolving landscape of education and the critical role of schools as centres of pedagogical innovation. He emphasised that institutions, particularly those within the NPSC network, comprising over 200 leading schools, must

move beyond implementing best practices to documenting, analysing, and publishing them as action research. Such efforts, he noted, would not only strengthen internal reflection but also position Indian schools more prominently within global educational discourse.

Drawing attention to contemporary educational priorities, Mr Gupta spoke of the importance of integrating social-emotional learning, referencing approaches such as the RULER framework, as well as practices like low floor–high ceiling tasks that address diverse learning needs within classrooms. He encouraged schools to examine the impact of their initiatives—be it mood meters, project based learning, or environmental inquiry such as water quality assessments—and to translate these into structured, research-backed models that could be shared widely.

He also highlighted progressive disciplinary approaches such as restorative justice and peer mediation as alternatives to punitive systems, underscoring the importance of empathy, dialogue, and community-building within schools. Further, he addressed the growing influence of artificial intelligence and reiterated that schools must assert their irreplaceable role in nurturing human values, relationships, and social understanding. Education, he affirmed, is not merely about information delivery but about shaping individuals who can think critically, collaborate meaningfully, and respond ethically. He also apprised the gathering of upcoming CBSE initiatives, including digital evaluation systems, teacher training frameworks, and the development of a global curriculum aligned with international standards. Inviting the active participation of NPSC schools, he called upon them to lead in adopting and refining these innovations.



A moment of pride and celebration followed with the **felicitation of distinguished educators** who had been honoured with the **Delhi State Awards and School Excellence Awards**. Among those felicitated were Ms Manjit Kaur (Modern School, Barakhamba Road), Ms Chhaya Grover (Salwan Public School, Rajendra

Nagar), Ms Meena Mittal (Modern Public School, BM Block, Shalimar Bagh), Ms Parineeti Sharma (ITL Public School, Dwarka), and Ms Rajna Chaddha (Bal Bharati Public School, Gangaram Hospital Marg). Their contributions stand as exemplars of dedication, leadership, and excellence in education.

The session also recognised institutions acknowledged as **Region's Best Schools** by the Government of NCT of Delhi. These included Modern School, Barakhamba Road (represented by Dr Vijay Datta, Principal); Tagore International School, Vasant Vihar (represented by Ms Anu Roach on behalf of Principal Ms Jyotika Kalra); and Hansraj Model School (represented by Ms Ruchika Bahl on behalf of Principal Ms H. L. Handa). These honours reflected sustained institutional commitment to quality education and innovation.



Another significant segment of the session was the formal induction of new member schools into the NPSC fraternity, symbolising growth, inclusivity, and shared purpose. Among those welcomed were Ms Manisha Joshi, Principal, Mother Mary

School, Mayur Vihar; Ms Aarti Saini, Principal, Platinum Valley School, Ghaziabad; the Principal of Suraj Bhan DAV Public School, Vasant Vihar; and Dr Raji (Director), representing NK Bagodia School, Dwarka. The induction underscored the collaborative ethos of NPSC and its commitment to expanding a network of excellence.



The conference overview was presented by **Ms. Swarnima Luthra**, Treasurer, NPSC, and Principal, ASN Senior Secondary School, Mayur Vihar. In a succinct yet comprehensive reflection, she traced the intellectual journey of the conference, held under the theme **Vidya for Life: Schools as Catalysts for Skills, Values, and Innovation**. She highlighted key sessions, including the inaugural address by Mr. Pavan

Kumar Varma, IFS (Retd.), who emphasised original thinking as the foundation of civilisation, and the keynote by Dr Rahul Singh, Chairman, CBSE, who outlined the pillars of competency-based education, multilingualism, skill development, and AI integration. She also reflected on subsequent sessions that explored ethical citizenship, emotional well-being, interdisciplinary learning, and the arts as a medium of expression, including Katha Manch and Mystic Land, which reinforced the role of creativity and empathy in education. Her concluding thought, that education must move beyond preparation for life to becoming life itself, captured the spirit of the conference.

The formal proceedings concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks by **Dr. Anupama Mishra**, Joint Secretary, NPSC, and Principal, Sunbeam School, Varuna. She expressed deep gratitude to the distinguished guests, including Mr Rahul Singh, Chairman, CBSE; Mr Pavan Kumar Varma, IFS (Retd.); and Dr Shashi Tharoor, Member of Parliament, for their invaluable contributions. She also acknowledged the efforts of the organising schools; DAV Public School, Sector 49; Tagore International School, East of Kailash; Army Public School, Delhi Cantt; and Amity International School; for their roles in publication, logistics, and hospitality. Special appreciation was extended to the student



performers, including the school choir and bagpipers of Modern School, Barakhamba Road, whose presence added vibrancy to the event, as well as to the anchoring team and numerous volunteers who worked tirelessly behind the scenes.

In her closing remarks, Dr. Mishra reminded the gathering that educators remain lifelong learners, with 'miles to go' in the journey of understanding and shaping young minds. As the session concluded with an invitation to continue conversations over lunch, it left participants with more than just reflections; it offered direction, inspiration, and a renewed collective resolve.

The valedictory session thus stood not merely as a conclusion, but as a thoughtful bridge between reflection and action, carrying forward the spirit of **Vidya for Life** into classrooms, communities, and the wider educational landscape.
