RITINJALI

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LEARNING TO LEARN
Pallavan Learning Systems

CENTRE FOR
ESCALATION
OF PEACE | CEP

BEYOND THE TEXTBOOK

DESIGNING LEARNING EXPERIENCES
FOR DEEPER ENGAGEMENT

12 MARCH 2026
WEBINAR REPORT

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Thursday, 12 March 2026, 5 PM IST

This webinar explores how educators can move beyond textbook-driven instruction to design inclusive learning ecosystems that foster deep understanding, critical thinking, and meaningful engagement for every learner.

MODERATOR:
KREETI GOSWAMI
Projects & Programmes Associate
Pallavan Learning Systems, India

PANELIST:
RUPAMANJARI HEGDE
Faculty, School of Education
Azim Premji University, India

PANELIST:
YANGTSHEL WANGYEL
Student, The Royal Academy
Druk Gyalpo's Institute, Bhutan

PANELIST:
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Senior Physics and STEM Facilitator
Prakriti School, India

For more information, please visit:
www.pallavanlearningsystems.com
www.ritinjali.org
www.cepeace.org

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INTRODUCTION

Pallavan Learning Systems, along with Centre for Escalation of Peace and Ritinjali, hosted its 23rd webinar on 12 March 2026 on the theme *Beyond the Textbook: Designing Learning Experiences for Deeper Engagement*. The session explored how educators can move beyond textbook driven instruction in order to create learning environments that foster curiosity, critical thinking, and meaningful engagement.

Textbooks continue to play an important role in education because they provide structure, sequencing, and alignment with curricular frameworks. However, deep learning does not arise merely from completing textbook content. It emerges when students connect ideas with their lived experiences, question assumptions, engage in dialogue, and reflect critically on what they learn.

The webinar explored how classrooms can evolve into inclusive learning ecosystems in which collaboration, inquiry, reflection, and dialogue are embedded in everyday teaching practice. Rather than abandoning textbooks, the discussion focused on how teachers can expand learning beyond them while still maintaining academic rigour and working within existing curricular structures.

The conversation brought together perspectives from teacher education, classroom practice, and student experience. Together these perspectives highlighted the challenges and possibilities of designing learning experiences that are both inclusive and intellectually engaging.

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ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Moderator

Kreeti Goswami

Projects & Programmes Associate

Pallavan Learning Systems, India

Kreeti Goswami is an educator specialising in social science and history. She has taught at middle and senior school levels across schools in the Delhi–NCR region and has over seven years of experience in classroom teaching and educational research. She holds an M.Phil. in History from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Prior to entering the field of education, she worked in broadcast media and archives across India.

Panelist

Dr Rupamanjari Hegde

Faculty, School of Education

Azim Premji University, India

Dr. Rupamanjari Hegde teaches at the School of Education, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru. She brings over two decades of experience in the field of education, having worked in various roles including teacher educator, instructional designer, and content developer. She has been associated with organisations such as I Am A Teacher, Gurgaon, and XSEED Education. Rupamanjari holds a PhD in the Sociology of Education from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, along with an MA and MPhil in Ancient Indian History from JNU. She has presented research papers at several national and international conferences, authored academic articles, and writes extensively in newspapers and magazines on issues related to school education.

Panelist

Yangtshel Wangyel

Student, The Royal Academy

Druk Gyalpo's Institute, Bhutan

Yangtshel Wangyel is an 11th-grade student at the Druk Gyalpo's Institute in Bhutan. He has a strong interest in technology and science and is passionate about using innovation for the greater good. He is currently working on several projects, including the development of a Dzongkha AI chatbot aimed at preserving and promoting Bhutanese linguistic and cultural identity. He is also engaged in an experimental proposal exploring the energy disposition of particles. Through his learning journey, Yangtshel seeks to continually develop his creativity, discipline, and commitment to meaningful inquiry.

Panelist

Krishna K. Purohit

Senior Physics and STEM Facilitator

Prakriti School, India

Krishna Kumar Purohit is a Senior Physics and STEM Facilitator at Prakriti School, Noida, where he also serves as the Curiosity Coach. He works with a team of facilitators to design hands-on, experiential approaches to teaching and learning that move beyond traditional classroom methods. His work focuses on enabling students to learn through exploration, apply concepts in real-world contexts, and experience learning as joyful and engaging. Prior to joining Prakriti School, he worked at the Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar as an Assistant Scientific Officer, where he developed experiential content in science and mathematics. He has also taught Physics in both IB and CBSE schools. Krishna holds a Master's degree in Social Entrepreneurship from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and a B.Tech. in Information Technology from Jaypee University of Information Technology, Himachal Pradesh. Earlier in his career, he worked as a software engineer at Infosys.

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W E B I N A R   S E S S I O N

The Textbook as a Starting Point for Learning

The discussion began by reconsidering the role that textbooks play in education. Textbooks organise curriculum content and provide teachers with a structured framework for teaching. At the same time, when textbooks become the sole authority in the classroom, learning can become restricted to memorisation and the completion of syllabus requirements.

Participants emphasised that textbooks should be understood as starting points for learning rather than as boundaries that limit exploration. When teachers treat textbooks as entry points into inquiry, students are able to examine ideas more critically and connect them to broader contexts.

One reason textbooks dominate classroom practice is the examination system. In many educational contexts examinations reward the reproduction of predetermined answers. Teachers therefore feel compelled to prioritise textbook coverage so that students can perform well in assessments.

The discussion suggested that meaningful educational change requires rethinking evaluation systems. If education seeks to cultivate reflection and critical thinking, then assessment

methods must also allow students to demonstrate interpretation, reasoning, and independent thought rather than merely recalling fixed answers.

Questioning the Knowledge Presented in Textbooks

The conversation also examined the nature of knowledge that appears in textbooks. Textbooks often represent what is considered authorised or approved knowledge. This knowledge is shaped by historical, political, and social contexts and may reflect the perspectives of dominant groups.

Examples were shared to illustrate how textbook representations may unintentionally exclude certain groups of learners. One example described a lesson in which a social studies textbook presented a large urban house with multiple rooms as the standard model of a home. For many students who come from rural or economically marginalised communities, such representations may not reflect their lived realities.

In these situations students may internalise the idea that their own experiences are less valuable or less important than those presented in textbooks. Similarly, textbooks sometimes reinforce gender stereotypes. Mathematics word problems may show girls purchasing dolls while boys are associated with cars or mechanical objects. Such representations subtly reinforce assumptions about gender roles.

The discussion highlighted that teachers can address these limitations by opening up textbook content to discussion and by inviting students to bring alternative experiences and perspectives into the classroom.

Inclusion and Representation in Learning

Another important theme was the need for inclusive learning environments. Classrooms today include students from diverse social, linguistic, and economic backgrounds. When learning materials represent only a narrow set of experiences, they risk excluding many learners.

Examples were discussed in which textbooks attempt to broaden representation. One story describes a migrant child who finds shelter inside a large roadside pipe and treats it as his home. Through this narrative students are invited to reflect on the meaning of home and the diverse

circumstances in which people live. Such stories encourage empathy and help learners recognise social diversity.

Similarly, history textbooks increasingly present multiple perspectives. Instead of focusing exclusively on rulers and elites, they also include the experiences of peasants, workers, women, and other groups. This approach encourages students to understand that history consists of many different narratives rather than a single dominant story.

Through such representations textbooks can support dialogue and critical reflection about society.

Inquiry and Active Learning

The webinar also explored ways teachers can encourage deeper engagement while continuing to use textbooks as a framework.

Participants discussed the importance of inquiry based learning. In this approach, students investigate questions, analyse evidence, and develop their own interpretations. Teachers guide students through these processes rather than simply delivering information.

For example, in history lessons students can examine primary sources and attempt to interpret them as historians would. In other situations, students may be asked to read sections of a text collaboratively and identify answers to guiding questions. Students can also develop their own questions and challenge each other's interpretations during classroom discussions. Visual sources such as paintings or historical artefacts can be analysed in order to understand cultural contexts. Creative tasks such as constructing models of ancient settlements can help students imagine historical environments more vividly. These practices encourage students to interact actively with knowledge. Instead of memorising information, they begin to analyse and interpret it.

The discussion also emphasised that learners bring their own experiences into the classroom. Education should therefore not treat students as empty vessels into which knowledge is deposited. Instead, teachers should acknowledge and build upon the experiences students already possess.

Student Voice and Participation

The panel discussed the idea of involving students more actively in shaping their learning experiences. In some educational settings, students participate in designing elements of their learning. They may suggest activities, provide feedback on teaching methods, or contribute ideas about how topics can be explored.

When students feel that their voices are valued, they develop a stronger sense of ownership over learning. However, it was also acknowledged that no single method can work equally well for every student. Some learners respond well to drama and storytelling activities, while others prefer structured quizzes or written exercises.

For this reason, teachers often need to provide varied learning experiences so that students with different preferences and strengths can engage with the subject.

Relationships and the Learning Environment

Another theme that emerged during the discussion was the importance of relationships in the classroom. Moving beyond textbook driven instruction requires more than introducing creative activities. It also requires building trust between teachers and students. When students feel respected and heard they are more willing to ask questions and share ideas.

Teachers were encouraged to move away from the traditional model in which the teacher stands as the sole authority delivering knowledge. Instead, teachers and students can explore ideas together. In some cases, teachers may acknowledge that they do not immediately know the answer to a question and invite students to investigate the issue together. Such openness helps create a classroom environment where curiosity and inquiry can flourish.

Artificial Intelligence and Learning

The discussion also addressed the increasing presence of artificial intelligence in education. Artificial intelligence tools can provide instant responses to questions and allow students to explore topics in greater depth. Students can ask repeated questions and receive detailed explanations that help them understand complex ideas. Teachers themselves may use artificial

intelligence to explore questions that arise during classroom discussions or to investigate topics from multiple perspectives.

However, the discussion also emphasised that artificial intelligence has limitations. Although it can provide information, it cannot easily inspire curiosity or passion for learning. Nor can it interpret students' emotional expressions or understand the social dynamics of a classroom. For this reason, artificial intelligence is most useful as a complementary resource rather than as a replacement for teachers.

Systemic Challenges

Participants also reflected on the structural constraints that influence teaching practices. These include short lesson periods, examination requirements, and expectations from parents and institutions.

Even when schools attempt to reduce examination pressure in the early years, parents often seek measurable indicators of academic progress. Many parents wish to know their child's rank in class or worry about how students will cope with examinations in later grades.

Educational change therefore requires dialogue not only within classrooms but also with parents, school leaders, and the wider community.

Q & A   H I G H L I G H T S

Q1. From a learner's perspective, what kinds of classroom experiences make learning feel meaningful and engaging? And how can teachers incorporate student voice without losing academic rigour?

A. Yangtshel Wangyel: For me, learning becomes meaningful when what we learn in the classroom connects to real life. When we apply concepts outside the classroom, it helps us understand why we are learning something. For example, we might use mathematics to conduct surveys and then create graphs from the data we collect. In biology, we may grow bacteria in a laboratory and observe how they develop. When learning is applied in real situations like this, it becomes much more engaging.

Regarding student voice, I think there is a misconception that including students' perspectives will reduce academic rigour. In my view, that is not true. Giving students a voice simply means asking them what they want to learn and why they want to learn it. The reason for learning should not only be that the topic will appear in an examination. It should arise from curiosity. When students become curious about something, that curiosity naturally drives deeper learning. Teachers can also ask students how they would prefer to learn a concept because each student learns in a different way. Bringing curiosity and student perspectives into learning can actually strengthen academic rigour rather than weaken it.

Q2. How has your experience been as a student having dialogue or discussion with teachers on disagreements or differences of opinion, especially around academic concepts?

A. Yangtshel Wangyel: In my experience, discussions and disagreements with teachers can strengthen learning because they encourage us to think more deeply about the concepts we are studying. For instance, in a biology class, we had a discussion about lactic acid and muscle fatigue. The teacher explained that lactic acid builds up after intense physical activity and causes muscle cramps. Some of us thought that lactic acid might also have a positive role because muscle breakdown can lead to stronger muscles during recovery. We discussed this idea further and continued thinking about it even after the class. Later, the teacher returned with additional

explanations and clarified that both perspectives contained elements of truth. Lactic acid can contribute to fatigue, but the body also rebuilds muscle tissue through recovery processes. That discussion helped us understand the concept much more clearly.

Q3. Does the theory of Multiple Intelligences still hold true today in your opinion? If yes, do you think AI can help design differentiated learning experiences for diverse learners?

A. Krishna K. Purohit: Students clearly learn in different ways. Some learners understand concepts better through visual explanations, while others learn through discussion, experimentation, or hands-on activities. Artificial intelligence can support learning because it allows students to explore ideas at their own pace and ask questions repeatedly until they understand something. One advantage of AI is that it has patience. Students can continue asking questions and receive explanations as many times as they need. Teachers themselves can also use AI tools to explore questions that arise during classroom discussions and examine ideas from different perspectives. However, AI cannot replace teachers. Teaching involves understanding students' emotions, motivations, and expressions. AI can provide information, but it cannot build relationships or inspire curiosity in the same way that teachers can.

Q4. Teachers and learners now explore many approaches and strategies to go beyond textbooks. How far do curriculum and assessment design support different learner abilities when determining grades and standards of learning?

A. Krishna K. Purohit: Assessment systems play a very significant role in shaping how teaching happens in classrooms. In many systems assessment still focuses on standardised answers and examination performance. When assessment is structured in this way, it becomes difficult to recognise different ways of learning and different abilities among students. Some schools have experimented with reducing the emphasis on examinations in the early years. There are schools where there are no formal exams until Grade 5 or even Grade 8. However, even in such contexts, parents often want to know how their child is performing compared with others. They may enrol children in competitions or seek other forms of comparison. This shows that assessment practices are closely connected to broader societal expectations.

Q5. While teachers are constrained by the demands of exam systems based on textbooks, and students are used to being passive recipients, how can we get everyone excited about looking beyond textbooks?

A. Rupamanjari Hegde: One important approach is to build a connection between what students learn and their own lives. When students feel that learning relates to their experiences, they become more interested and engaged. For example, in history classes, I often suggest beginning with something like family history. Instead of starting with events that happened thousands of years ago, students can begin by exploring the history of their own families. They can speak to their parents or grandparents, collect stories or photographs, and try to understand how their family histories have evolved over time. When students begin with something familiar, they realise that history is not only about distant events but also about the lives of ordinary people. From this starting point teachers can gradually introduce broader historical questions and themes.

CONCLUSION

The webinar brought together perspectives from classroom practice, teacher education, and student experience to reflect on how learning can meaningfully extend beyond textbook driven instruction. While textbooks continue to provide an important framework for organising knowledge and aligning teaching with curricular expectations, the discussion highlighted that deeper learning emerges when students are able to question ideas, engage in dialogue, and connect academic concepts with their lived experiences.

Throughout the session, speakers emphasised that moving beyond textbooks does not mean abandoning them. Instead, it involves rethinking how they are used in the classroom. When teachers open up textbook content to discussion, encourage inquiry, and invite students to contribute their perspectives, the classroom becomes a space where knowledge is explored rather than simply delivered. In such environments, students begin to take greater ownership of their learning and develop the confidence to ask questions, examine multiple viewpoints, and reflect on their understanding.

The conversation also acknowledged the challenges teachers face in designing such learning experiences. Curriculum requirements, examination systems, and parental expectations often shape how learning is organised in schools. At the same time, the discussion suggested that even within these constraints teachers can create opportunities for inquiry, dialogue, and collaboration that help students engage more deeply with their subjects.

The session concluded with a lively interaction with the audience. Participants raised thoughtful questions about student voice in the classroom, the role of dialogue and disagreement in learning, the relevance of theories such as multiple intelligences, and the possibilities offered by artificial intelligence for supporting diverse learners. Questions also addressed the relationship between curriculum design, assessment practices, and the ability to recognise different forms of learning and achievement. This exchange between the panel and the audience extended the discussion beyond the prepared themes and allowed participants to reflect collectively on the practical realities of teaching and learning.

The webinar reaffirmed that meaningful learning emerges when classrooms encourage curiosity, dialogue, and reflection. Textbooks remain valuable resources, but when used as starting points rather than final authorities, they can open pathways for exploration, critical thinking, and deeper engagement with knowledge.

LEARNINGS FROM THE WEBINAR

One of the central learnings from the webinar was that textbooks continue to play an important role in organising knowledge and providing structure to teaching, but meaningful learning occurs when educators go beyond simply delivering textbook content. When teachers encourage dialogue, questioning, and reflection, students begin to see learning as an active process rather than something that is passively received. The discussion highlighted that classrooms can become more engaging when students are invited to connect academic ideas with their own experiences, examine different perspectives, and participate in shaping the learning process. In such environments, the textbook becomes a starting point for inquiry rather than the final authority on knowledge.

Another key insight was the importance of recognising the diversity of learners and the different ways in which they engage with knowledge. Students do not all learn in the same manner, and meaningful learning experiences often require a combination of approaches that include discussion, collaboration, reflection, and creative exploration. The webinar also highlighted the value of dialogue between teachers and students, where differences of opinion and questioning can lead to a deeper understanding of concepts. At the same time, participants acknowledged that systemic factors such as curriculum design, examination systems, and parental expectations influence how teaching and learning unfold in schools. Even within these constraints, thoughtful teaching practices can create opportunities for curiosity, student voice, and deeper engagement with learning.

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