**Ms. Rizmina Rafeek**

**Date of interview: 11 September 2021**

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we're recording the video is that fine, we will ensure that it will not be shared with anyone. So we can we start with you introducing yourself ?

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Yes, I am Rizmina Rafi. I live in Sri Lanka. And I'm from Colombo, I am a preschool teacher. I'm teaching for almost 16 years. But I've started my own preschool for nine years now since 2000. Not nine actually came with this year one year when we didn't even feel it goes up. Since 2009, I have been , end of 2009. December started the preschool. And so that's all about me. Yeah.

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So the first question is, did schools in your location close down during the pandemic? and for how long was the school closure?

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Yeah, the schools in our area actually closed down because of the pandemic. And we were sort of like, the preschools were the first areas to close down. When the government imposed restrictions. The first ever restriction was for preschools to close then they closed the higher grades, the primary grades, then the upper grades, then the senior grades. And then finally, the higher educational institutions. And when we are open, they are opening also like in between the open for almost one month or two months. Then also the same thing. The upper, the higher grades were started first, then the upper grades, then the primary and then finally, the preschools . During the last two years were open almost only for just totally around two months.

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So what is the status of schools now? Are they open? Sorry? What is the status of schools now? Are they open closed? No,

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we are close. Now. We are actually in a lockdown situation. So the schools are closed also, even before the lockdown was imposed, the schools were closed. Currently, we are in a lockdown situation. So all the schools are doing their lessons we are online. WhatsApp , Viber. So those methods are being used.

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Yeah, so that was the next question. So was there a transition made in the mode of teaching during the pandemic?

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we preschools before the lockdown was imposed. What we actually did was we told the parents to come and collect study packs, and we gave them study packs, and we guided the parents via WhatsApp. We actually used mostly WhatsApp in Sri Lanka. So most of the parents, we guided them via WhatsApp and through calls for those who don't have the facility. But now because we cannot issues study packs because we are locked down, we are completely doing it via WhatsApp and zoom classes. So higher grades, they actually did more through zoom. And they used to send these PDF documents for the parents to get printed out. And to the children, the worksheets.

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So how was the decision made to make this transition and who are involved in the process of making this decision?

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Actually, there was no government involvement or anything. The government what they told us they actually told us to close the preschools, close the schools, but they didn't give us a system. So the each preschool made up their own system different preschools are doing different systems around Sri Lanka, not only preschools, even schools, different schools are doing different systems. Some schools are entirely based on zoom. Some schools are entirely based on Google tape teams, and some schools they are entirely doing these defects only. So even preschools are going like that. Some preschools, they are being only study pack some preschools, they're doing different methods, but each institution is doing what is relevant to them. There is no body governing all these systems. And on top of that, now for the primary sections, in schools, there is no education system going on. Even we are online because the teachers are on strike actually. So preschool teachers are not on strike the highest higher grades, the primary grades, and the higher grades, the schoolteacher out has tried. So the children are not getting any lessons at all, except for the private sector schools. So why are the teachers on strike, they actually demanding a higher salary and they need because everything has gone, the inflation rate has gone high and all the expenses, everything has gone I hide during this pandemic because of the lockdown as well. So the teachers are requesting a higher salary what they're getting, they're not satisfied with it, because you're working on a strike.

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And just to clarify, so when you are running a preschool what is the age group of students in the school

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earlier, I used to have since two and a half to five years old. in Sri Lanka, we start formal education at six years old. So until that we had the preschool but because of the pandemic, I stopped taking enrollment for two and a half years, because that age is too small to do like what I thought is to do Zoom , more study packs without being introduced to sports, like that age is too small. So I stopped taking two and a half. Now I'm doing only four year olds and five year olds.

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So if you could explain what was the teaching learning method used in your school during the pandemic,

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what I actually did was before the lockdown was imposed, I call the parents once a week to come and collect the study pack. So I used to give these study packs with all certainty my used to take one theme for a week. And for each week, we give a study pack with a little bit of mathematical concepts, language concepts, and then environmental concepts, all the concepts in one study pack for a week, or sometimes depending on the team, it might go for two weeks, and then the parent has to take that and go home. And then I have given dates, like for each day, they will be doing only just two pages, just like matching and those type of small activities for them, pasting something. So each day doing only two pages. And via Whatapp I will guide the parents, because the parents mostly don't have an idea. Even if they if we tell them to paste, what will happen is they will you know, they will be doing the pasting. They won't be allowing because especially in Sri Lanka, most of the parents are not very educated about the early childhood, and how important pasting and all that off of fingers. So what they will want is they will want to do a neat job. So because of that, via WhatsApp, I guide the parents and I tell them to take a video if possible, have the child doing the activity and send it to me. So when it comes to activities, like pacing and all they can take the video of that particular activity and send it so when it comes to like writing patterns or mathematical concepts I sometimes depending on the concept of depending on the lesson. So we'll say for example, our concept is to teach them begins for so I give the parents instructions we have about how to do an activity like maybe tell them collect five big objects and collect five small objects and ask the child to sort out the big objects separate and the small objects separate and send a video of them. So depending on the topic that I'm doing I tell them give them instructions, and they have to do the lesson and send me a video. So other than that, once a week, we do a zoom session that is singing and storytelling, and then a little bit of like, sometimes we assume I give this up, I share my screen, I make a picture, I use the app poster maker. And make this worksheet and we'll say I'm introducing number one, for example. So I make a worksheet for one to identify and circle number one for safe we are doing to like match two objects or circle two objects or something like that worksheet, and share my screen share that picture through the zoo. And ask the kids to color two objects or circle two objects or circle the number two in the zoo on the screen. So for them, it's like a game so they just you know enjoy doing that. Because kids nowadays the kids are very familiar with Forge. So they do that and that is how I do these days. But because of the lockdown now, I have no way of giving the study pack because the parents can come to collect it. So now I send the instructions, simple instructions, which the parents can do the study packs by themselves. So was

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did you give the study pack to the parents before the pandemic also.

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before the pandemic, I didn't give study packs, because the children come to school. So we do the lessons at school, we do like if we are like say for example, I'm going to give them a draw an apple and give them to paste paper on that Apple will say, I don't have to give you a study pack for them to do it at home. I can do it at school. Okay, this is a pen that week. I can't do it at school, so I'm sending it.

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So other than Zoom and WhatsApp that you mentioned, were there any new digital learning technologies that were introduced in your school system during the pandemic,

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yes, some of the schools in Sri Lanka use Microsoft Teams. And as far as I know, only Microsoft Teams and Viber is used other than WhatsApp and WhatsApp in normal days, there are some schools which use telegram as well.

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Was the school already using these technologies before the pandemic?

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No, we weren't. We were actually getting the children like we had about subgroup for parents like to give them information in case of, we'll say, like, we have a day a special day, a parent day or color day or something to give them the information. We had a whatsapp group. Other than that we didn't use these techniques, zoomies actually knew

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what we're teaching learning materials readily available in the digital forms. And who was responsible for this creating this.

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teaching materials Actually, we ourselves make it so my teacher and myself, we had some, we have some teaching materials, which we used before the pandamic because we used to use these teaching aids. So along with that, when we if we need something external, we need some extra things out now. Because there are some things that we can't use, which we use before the pandemic. So for those teaching aids, we have made it ourselves, my mice, myself and the other two teachers. We make the teaching materials by ourselves and we use it.

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what were your roles and responsibilities in preparing to teach during the pandemic?

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Because it's like this, like in Sri Lanka, six years old, the children get enrolled to a formal education school. So they go there. I don't know how the system is in other countries. But in Sri Lanka, they have to face an interview where they, you know, right, a little bit like, maybe their names, or like, sometimes they're shown letters and asked, asked what the letters are. And then when they go to grade one, that is the start the first grade of the formal education. They are given like, the teacher writes a small words that things on the school some schools, they go with two letter words, some schools, they go with three letter words, some schools they go with, just I forgot, so that depends on the type of school that a child is going to enroll himself or herself. So depending on that, the child has to, you know, go to that level when they are in Sri Lanka. age of five, because they're starting formal education. So according to that requirement, we, as preschool teachers have a very big duty, not only to get the child, you know, teach the child, the moral education, how the socialization and emotional development and skill development, we also have to give them an academic development because they have to go to grade one, and they should be able to work there. Because otherwise the preschools are being blamed by the parents and grade one teachers. And not only that the child is also finding will find it hard if he goes to grade one. And if he can't write the letters, the teacher goes and writes the letters on the board or the child has to compete. So as preschool teachers, we have to, you know, meet that responsibility of giving the child academic side as well as moral education, then all the other types of education along with the academic also. So we had a huge role. And we had a huge challenge during the pandemic, to give all these children, especially when it comes to socialization, with children to come and you know, meet each other. So we had to do games via zoom, where they get to socialize with their friends. and emotional development, we couldn't like, we can't do it practically we in the school, so we had to tell them stories and give a video recording of the story of the teacher telling the story and share that story to the child. And the child had to, you know, look at that. And then you know, like, say, for example, that the story of the Three Bears, we did a video of the teachers telling the story of the three years. And then we ask the child questions, like we told the parents to ask them oral questions and send their reactions to us. Like say, for example, how did the baby be felt when he saw that his travels broken? How did Goldilocks feel when she woke up, and so three bears. So Charlie child had to you know, at 10 shows, when the chat broke, he had to cry and show them in the Goldilocks servo. Like the child had to act out how it was surprising it shows so that is the way we could teach them emotional development, we couldn't directly talk to the child directly develop those things. So all these things we had to do via technology. And so that is part of our response. We can even cutting when it comes to cutting bones, most of the parents don't like to give their children a scissor, especially in Sri Lanka, because the children tend to take it and cut their hair. So the parents still do, we don't give scissors to the child. So we have to change the parents mentality and make the parent give the sister to the child and you know, teach them step by step because parents they will, you know, just give the sister okay, but that is it. So we had to tell them, okay, we had to give them room looks like to catch me to sleep first. And then to cut, you know, the straight lines, then curved lines, then both lines together, we had to go a layer to completely teach the parent and then guide the child also, we had a double role. But it was our responsibility because when the child goes to pray to the child should be able to, you know, do this step or the fingers should be developed. So we had to bring that finger down.

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We had to find different ways. And another biggest challenge we had was when they're at school, they have this equipment, they can use this knob cylinders to you know, develop these fighter muscles. When they're at home, we can't expect them to have a knob cylinder. So we have to think new technology, new ideas, new things without the involvement of materials where the child learns, you know these type of things. So like say for example, instead of knob cylinders, we told the children to take this toothpicks and pick it on Reggie forms, so to speak, send Reggie forms, we found that who asked and we told them to take a stand, set up small tray of plays and let the child because regular parents had no access to even clay, even paint, they didn't have access. Because shops are closed, we are locked down. So we had to give parents options for that when we told them to give the child to paint even finger painting. They have no access for paint because they didn't buy and keep paint at home in Sri Lanka. Parents expect everything in the school job and they don't buy and keep this type of materials. So we had to give them options like maybe take beetroot juice and use that to paint so we had to think all that and fulfill our responsibility. The challenges

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So, as you mentioned, so what are the other major challenges faced by the school administration and teachers in transition to the new mode of teaching?

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The biggest challenge is we have to educate parents, first of all, so when the child is coming to school, because most of the parents in Sri Lanka know that, you know, educated about early childhood, especially early early childhood, you know, they run behind the higher grade children, and that also for exams, like in grade five days are like, that is when the child is seven years old, there's an exam, there's a major exam for the child. It's called a scholarship exam in Sri Lanka. So if the child passes, that the child gets to enroll in a good school in a good school, in a sense, like in a popular school, so all parents want their child to pass that scholarship exam. So when the child passes grade three, they start planning for that exam. But they don't realize the importance of early childhood education, only the educators that is the ones who have the causes have a diploma, and they know the importance of education, early childhood education, know that. So we had to convey this to the parent when we are convened, there was a lot of barriers. For example, the parents said, We have no time to spend with our preschool child. Because we have an elder child who is being a scholarship next year who is doing the old re ordinary levels, the next year, that is the final red like red pill exams, that is that net 16 years old, are like, we have a major exam coming for the child and we can't see the b grade child is important. So we had to make them realize that this is important. And on top of that, when when we give it surprises, exercises, like say, for example, the one I said the picking of toothpicks, we had to emphasize them that this is very important for your child to do this exercise, because what they thought was okay, this is just a Starcraft teacher is just wasting time sending aircraft for us to do, some of them didn't do it. Then finally, I had to explain them how important it is to train the fingers to develop the fingers, how important it is to teach the to develop a child's finer muscles so that the child can write letters in the future. So we had to do that. And on top of that, this actually I didnt face, but some of the schools they faced this issue, like we have a union. So we discussed these things in the Union. So another thing is like, during this pandemic, we had to tell parents some teaching techniques. So then afterwards, when the pre school started the parents, they said like there's no point of sending the child to the preschool. Now we know what to do in the preschool so we can teach the child. So some of the pre schools lost their income because the children got reduced. So the teachers were reluctant to teach, you know, teach these type of things to the parents, because then again, the parents decide that they don't need to send their child to the preschool. So I actually didn't have this issue because I are I along with this, I told the parents how important it is for the child to do it in front of the teacher because when they send videos, sometimes they do they mistake, they do mistakes. Say for example, the child was supposed to hold the toothpick with the fingers like this, so that he learns it. so instead of doing that, like that, he holds the toothpick like this, and fix it, so the mother doesn't know that this is wrong. And she just says, okay, she thought that is okay, she sent the video. So then I had to explain that no, the child has to hold it like this so that the child will get used for folding the pencil in the future. And that when I taught that time that when I told them that type of things, they realize that okay, though, they know some things, they still have some things they don't know. But some of the teachers are not ready to tell that way the parents to communicate that. And there is also a big difficulty for the parents to make this child schichten do the work. Because when it comes to school, the environment is different. And for some reason, the children are you know, sitting and doing the work at school, but they're not doing that same thing at home. So it's very hard for the mothers to do that, especially when it comes to the higher grades. I have a grade three son he's in he's nine years old. When the teacher says PDF, it's very hard to make him sit and you know, do the worksheets, especially after one and a half, almost one and a half or two years of not going school. He has you know, got a little bit used to it now. He's winning. They go to school, they sit for five or six hours and they do continuous work. But now, it's very hard to make him sit even for half an hour and do work. So there is that challenge also,

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what was your experience of teaching at the time of the pandemic, please share both positive and negative experience.

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As a teacher, there was a lot of they actually I what I feel is personally there is both plus and minus in doing this, because one thing when we are teaching via zoom, and all those technical, all those we are using those tech aids. Now in preschools, in Sri Lanka, we don't have taken we don't even have a TV screen, because we actually can't afford because our parents pay a small amount. And from that small amount, we have to do all the things we actually can't afford TV screens, or handles digital media's we actually can't afford that. But the children, they love these digital media's and all that. Because now with all the children, almost all the children are used to, you know, playing with phones, they loved those things, those techniques. So this is an advantage for us to reach them through a technique. Now say for example, when I give these worksheets via zoom, and tell them to a match, the children they love to do it, I see bigger interest in them than, you know, giving the pencil and or chalk or crayon or whatever, when asking them to match in a paper more than they're more interested in the matching in this full screen. So there was that advantage. And on top of that, there was a there are disadvantages, because not all children have access to these media, especially in a country like Sri Lanka, most of the parents or people can't afford a, you know, smartphones, or let alone or even a smartphone, some of them can't afford. So. And some of them if they afford a small smartphone, they have no facilities to get data. And on top of that, with the pandemic, with the with all the inflation and tight economy and with their budget problems, they actually can't afford to, you know, make payments for for bills and all that and, you know, let their child currency for this class. And what they think is, oh, this is preschool, this is not important, we don't have to sell the child for this. So, unfortunately, the children are missing a very crucial time in their lives because of this. So, there is that challenge. And there is the challenge of the other challenges, which I mentioned throughout along with that, more than like, what are advantages, I see more disadvantages. Advantages, of course, the one that I said we can use technology. Other than that, as an advantage, I don't see more advantages. We see more disadvantages, especially the children not socializing. We had a lockdown period for around six or eight months, and then we opened up for one month and then again, when the Delta variant started to spread, we had to close again. So within that one month, I saw that a lot of children have you know, develop a lot of different, like they have changed your life. Earlier, they used to be very socialized, they used to be very friendly with other children. So that have gone down, they have become very selfish now being at home, that their attitudes have changed. They have a day, they had more or less empathy, like when they're at home, they're being pampered a lot unlike in a school, so they had less empathy. And they also couldn't get settled in school within that one month, it was very hard for them to settle in school. So and on top of that, they were like the most of the children, they started to short at tantrums at school, you know, they are they start when they get angry. They, they they were used to that being at home. So they started to show that at school also. And they they started to have more fights with other children, like every single thing is this. If one child gave it to another child expensive, they started brawling for that. So before it was not like that we had to because the children train and they they don't they talk when somebody comes in, take something and if they don't like it, they go and ask it in a nice way. But when they came after the lockdown, all that had changed. So that is another disadvantage of this pandemic situation.

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So, did you own or have access to devices for conducting your work?

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Yes, I actually personally have access because I have a smartphone and I have a laptop as well. I have a PC, so I had access. But some of the teachers, especially preschool teachers, and even formal education, teachers, didn't have these smartphones and all that. But for the formal education teachers, the government brought scheme where they gave the teachers, smartphones on installment basis payments. So the teacher out of the teacher salary, a small amount was deducted for the phone. And they those teachers could use that. But preschool teachers, we actually don't have a body to govern preschools, and you know, to do a lot of things in Sri Lanka, for preschools. So because of that, many preschool teachers didn't have access. And some of them were new to smartphones, they, some of the preschool teachers in Sri Lanka, you know, a little from the older generation. So they didn't they even if they have a smartphone, they don't know how to, you know, teach the children with the new techniques, they are not used to it, they're not used to video calls, they're not used to, you know, making these worksheets. They're not used to those things. And because of that, they couldn't conduct their online sessions. And they had to, you know, learn from someone else. So, so I myself thought a few teachers are these new technology, I taught them how to make a worksheet on poster maker. And I taught them how to, you know, make accusations we also, but then again, I do see a huge difference on it, because for them, it is too new to grasp it.

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Do you have any challenges in accessing internet for your work?

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Yes, there is. There, there are some challenges because we have several network providers in Sri Lanka. But the thing is, there are no there is no signal in some areas. So some of the children's there, there are a few particular areas where some of the children can't attend zoom sessions because they have no signal. So they take the phone, they have run around the house looking for a place where they can get the signal. And even with a Wi Fi connection, even with the router, they couldn't get signal some of the children. So not all family, all people in Sri Lanka, they don't have routers, most of them use mobile data. So when it comes to mobile data, some people don't have signal and on top of that, it's very expensive. Later on these companies, they started to introduce zoom packages or educational packages where they charge a monthly amount for unlimited zoom, teams and all those sorts of things. So until that came, we had to, you know, incur a huge expense for these data. Because zoom takes a lot of data. But once that came that was sold, but then again, for that some people didn't have a router. So a router entry. Likewise 3000 rupees people can't, you know, be the pandemic, they can't spend money on a router. So these parents, they can't give a router for the child and because of that the child has to do on mobile data. And while data is expensive, sometimes when there is no data the child has to take the class. And when there is no coverage the child cannot in the class, there are things like that.

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What are the additional resources you acquired in order to work effectively, like any new devices, software, stationery, furniture,

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video devices, actually, we didn't use we don't use external video devices, we use a phone to take the videos. Other than that, we had to, you know, make these props and all that when it comes to making videos I have seen or even read 123 teachers using these props and a beautiful background when they make these videos. Something relevant will say for example, we are teaching the Twinkle Twinkle Little Star song. So we had to you know use this background with stars and all that to convey the message to the child. And other than that, we didn't use any external devices because we actually can't afford most of the teachers in Sri Lanka don't have a camera they have a camera phone but they don't have a camera or a video recorder. So we used our phone for the phone has all these facilities nowadays. We used our phones most of the time. even higher grade schools, the teachers used mostly the phones. And some teachers they had to, you know, get a whiteboard because they didn't have whiteboards at home, so that they can keep the video and they write on the whiteboard for the child to see. But that is not practical because the whiteboard is too far for the child to see and what they are writing the child can't see clearly. So there was a lot of issues, but some teachers still use that. And there are television programs in Sri Lanka and you cannot switch that is not for the preschools, preschools, it has not started yet. But for the higher grades, they you know, telecast these pre recorded sessions with the teachers like the teacher teaching or whatever they are. Recently, sri lanka started TV channel for these educational purposes where each grade is given a time and they telecast teachers teaching lessons. So that is one development, but it didn't come reach preschools yet. And I don't know how practical it will be when it comes to preschool because you can't get a preschool child to sit and watch television for one or two hours. So might might not be practical for preschool. Maybe that is why that is not been imposed as well.

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What without digital skills you learned for teaching during the pandemic? And how did you acquire these skills?

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We actually taught ourselves we didn't have any workshops or anything. Most of the teachers they taught themselves. So we actually learned through, you know, error. We made errors, we made mistakes, and then we learned but we did get a few digital experiences. Like for example, I was not very familiar with poster making apps before. But now I'm a little bit further I'm very much familiar icons a little bit because I'm very much familiar with that. So I what I learned, I taught my fellow teachers also I mean, not only by preschool other preschools, also I taught them how to be ourselves, we conducted these workshops, we ourselves decided, Okay, each pre school calling another pre school and asking, okay, how do you do these workshops? How do you make the networks? How do you do these online sessions? How do you make these worksheets? So some preschools, what they did is they wrote these worksheets on paper, and they shared that picture of that paper on their screen, but they know that they can allow the child to you know, match, or write on the screen on the zoom screen. So then, we each one school, learn what we can, we thought the others we have this preschool union, where each area that teachers get together and we discuss and then when we discussed, we learned that, okay, this teacher knows this particular technique, and we got that teacher to teach us when when another teacher knows something, we taught that teacher so that way, we also did something in develop process.

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The next question was related to like, do you have access to curriculum materials to meet the demands of teaching? You're mentioned about study pack? Just addition to that, did you create new materials or use the same materials? And how did you manage to engage students in learn,

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study materials actually , the study packs are the ones that we give the kids but other than that, we had to make some teaching aids like we had to make, say, we are teaching about fruit, we had to make, you know, these proofs on a picture of a fraud on the order stick or something. So earlier when we had when we put the get the children to school before the pandemic I mean, we you know, used to have this fruit day where the children are brought fruits to school and you know, we we taught them with the material be the fruits, but now, we can't ask the parents to get fruits because that is not possible because of the pandemic they are. The shops are closed, they can go and buy fruits and even if they can buy fruits have gone very expensive in Sri Lanka. So they can't afford it. Most of the time, most of the parents are on a budget these days because they have a salary cuts and all that. So we had to resort to pictures. So in that case, we had to, you know, get printouts and some teachers bring out some teachers, they can draw Well, they drew , they drew these pictures and they you know, pay Ready to put on a stick can show the child the picture. So we had to make extra teaching aids like that. And there was a challenge in that because schools are close now for me, I have access, because this is my preschool and all the materials are in school. So even if I want a board, or if I want a glitter sheet or a speedball, glue, even, I have it. But my other teachers, when they were making these teaching aids, they had an issue because they didn't have access to these materials, they don't have materials at home. So they couldn't go to the shop, even to buy a glue. So they had to, you know, resolve different different methods, one of my teachers even, you know, use a needle and thread to, you know, see for the stick come to the board. So they had to use this just, you know, normal, the cardboard, and crayons, she could get access to crayons, and she had to use this color papers, she actually didn't have color papers also. So she what she had to do was she used to take this magazine papers, and she used to hide that and use that. So she had that challenge. Also, because we didn't have materials, most of the teachers had that challenge. But we have to make those teaching aids Other than that, we didn't use any other materials.

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So now some questions related to well being. So how did you feel about work about your work during the pandemic? Is it different compared to the pre pandemic period? And did you feel you doing the same amount of work or mode,

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it is actually very different than the pre pandemic period. Because I know I'm I'm telling everything negative, because actually, it's more than most negative for us. So it was very different for us because we had to learn new system, we had to learn how to access these smart devices How to Look, I was actually start in the beginning, I was not very aware about zoom, I didn't know how to how to how to use zoom. So then I had to learn that and on top of that zoom gets, we don't have this pay. So it automatically gets disconnected in 40 minutes. So he had to find an alternative for that. And then we had all those challenges. And we also have it struggle now because we had to make these study paths, which we earlier didn't have to make like now we have to make a study pack for two weeks or one week, entirely at once. So that is a challenge. Because earlier what we did was not like that we had to plan each day, like we had a plan we had a master plan from for for a year for a month and for a weekend for I mean for each team and for a day. But now we had to you know, execute that entire plan at once. So we had to make all these worksheets at once. So we actually don't have these printing facilities. So we can we can't just put print out for these worksheets, we can't afford it because printing we have a fee. If you have to get printouts of everything here to get it from outside so then we have to spend a lot of money for that. And we can't afford them the way everything has to be handwritten. So when when it comes to handwritten making a one week, one week or two week depending on the theme one or two weeks worksheets is more harder than you know doing it for a day earlier what we did this for a day so that was more easy for us. And okay, so one might say okay, you do it for one week and then you're free, but you're not free because we have to check for the child since we as we had a certain time limit. So when a child comes to school at 9am the child goes at 11:30am so only within that time we had to spend with the child we had to think about the work the worksheets and all whatever whatever we are doing they say we are getting only at that time. But now why because we are doing it we are so sorry we are watsa that situation stage parents they sent sometimes this even send the worksheets the completed worksheets in the middle of the night. So we don't correct it in the middle of the night but still then it comes in the middle of the night so we have no with that school we know that all the children have done the work. So it's easy we can see it. It's it's visible. But we're now it's not like a one child will study the morning when our child will send it off from the however much we try to get them all to sell at the same time. That's not practical because parents work have also increased. They have whereas in a preschool we had all the children in one The age group and we can give a common activity for the children at home, the mothers are not having that ability, because their eldest son will be in grade 10, the other one will be in five, the other one will be a pre grader. So the mother has to do the worksheets for the the worksheets, or activities or whatever, for the older ones and the younger one, so she can keep all together and do as she had to she has to allocate her time for all three children along with her household work concerts. So we can't expect her to, you know, stick to a time frame because so whenever she says that, we feel like we are working all the time, because we all have our family. So when a child sensor worksheet, some vendor site child, which sends a video, we have to look at the whole video, and they are, again, data is getting used, we have to download the video, we have to look at the video, and then we have to comment on him. So when we are looking at the videos, it takes a few minutes, obviously five minutes per visit five minutes to watch the video. And then again, another child will send it. And then we see that again. So that again, messes with our time management, we can't spend time with our families. So we feel like you're working on this. And other than that, there is also the issue of like,when parents are sending their worksheets and all. Sometimes they don't, they don't realize that, okay, they should stick like they should have a minimum time like maybe six or before six o'clock, they don't think about that they sent some sometimes even in the middle of the night, so the phone starts ringing, that is a disturbance for us. So it's a lot of workload and a lot of pressure actually on us and we have to monitor with every child did to also so that is again, another workload because one child is sending another time now the child is sending another than we have to monitor everything and you know, come to go Okay, all the children I've seen fine. So if someone has not seen, we have to run behind the mother also, we have to send smss we have to ask them, Why haven't you sent the homework? Why haven't you done the worksheet? Would you be doing it? Sometimes when on the day we are giving the work? Study packs, the parents are not coming this day have certain issues, they don't come. So then we have to allocate another day, we have to go to the premises, we have to look it another day for them to come and collect it. So sometimes one parent says, Okay, I can't come to the teacher I have this sort of work to do. Are they coming to go or can I come tomorrow, so then we have to allocate a time for that parents, likewise, individually, we might have to give them a time. All that is time consuming for us. And even when it comes to zoom, the same thing happens though all the children come at the same time. Sometimes when we tell our time, I have classes for my eldest child at this time, I have classes for my hour, the parent has classes, or the parent has enough commitment at that particular time. And because of that the parent Can't you know, send the child for the zoom session at the time that we are requesting. So then we have to make the time change the time we'll make it flexible. It's very hard to get the time they are all the children can participate. So because the parents they don't think that please, please read education is important. They give importance to the other grades when when the time when we have already allocated time. But the higher grades for child's teacher tells Okay, I want to take classes at the state. They quickly give the child time and they they don't give a second thought they give the time. So there's all that. We feel like there's a huge workload, actually.

48:50

Yeah, just adding on to that. So what why your main concerns with regards to your work?

49:21

Yeah, there's a lot of concerns in the sense like, we actually don't have time we spend less time with a family because of these commitments. And another concern is that we have to, you know, use a lot of screen time with the kids because when it comes to making videos, we have to, we have to you know, sorry, you can't say we can't take a video One go at one go, we can complete a whole video. Sometimes if the mistakes happen and we have to take the video again, the entire video. So we actually have before the lockdown now because it's on a lockdown we do individual videos. So earlier we all the all the teachers in a preschool, we get to there, and we make the video. So when we are making the video, sometimes it takes a whole day. Because each teacher when they're making they make mistakes, we we are not used to you know, going in front of a video and performing in front of a video, it's like performing in front of kids is something you're used to, but performing in front of a video we're not used to. So most of the teachers I am actually not that shy and not that. Not that concerned about this video. But my other the other teachers in my preschool they had, they had to take a long time to get used to making videos. So earlier, they were feeling very awkward, they were not feeling comfortable with it, then they had to practice and practice until they became perfect. Still, we have to take two or three videos to get a perfect. So there are those type of concerns where we have to, you know, work more than we check. But we're still doing this because you know, we want to give the children our best. We want to give the children the best that we can even in this situation, because otherwise, they're going to struggle really hard when they go to grade. Because the parents can't meet their requirements, especially the early childhood care aged kids. The parents don't know their requirements, they the parents don't know what to give the child. And then what happens is the child goes to the gradebook without being prepared. And when they go to grade one. Sometimes the teachers they don't, especially here in Sri Lanka, we have one teacher for 30 students in grade 1, on average will be 40 they're going to increase it by the government. So when it comes to one teacher to 40 students, the ratio is really high. And then the preschool kid if the child is not at all ready for grade one, when the child goes there, if the child can't, you know, meet the requirement of grade one, the teacher will not give individual attention because out of 40 children treatment give individual attention for each every time the weaker child get pushed back, only the brilliant children will be taken front by the teacher. That is the mentality of most of the teachers, then what happens is, we as preschool teachers try our best to you know, bring all the children to a level where they can cope up with Gradle. So for that we have to even do it is very hard for us. Even though we have to do a lot of sacrifices. I've seen so many teachers struggling. So many still teachers struggling with this new techniques. Some of the teachers, that is not the preschool teachers, the higher grade teachers , My son is having Actually, I don't actually send him for the zoom sessions because he cannot sit in front of the screen for a long time. He once he fainted. And then he had some sight problems. So I stopped sending him for zoom sessions, I get this note from the teacher and I teach him personally. But my son's class teachers, they start the zoom sessions at 7:30am. And they go on till 1:30am. So every 40 minutes, once the zoom automatically closes, the session is closed, and they get a five minute break. And they have to start it again. So the children, they also have to sit at a stretch and be safe. If the child is not feeling sick. If the child is feeling uncomfortable, the child can you know just ignore going to the class where the teacher can't do that. Even though she's feeling hard, even though she she has to sit in front of the phone. And she has to have a lot of screen time. She can't just you know, tell I cannot have the class today because then all the children are not having a class. So she has to go through that. In my son's class teacher, she had this ad also because she was spending too much of time in front of the screen. So because in the daytime, she has to spend time from 7am to 1pm in front of the screen during the zoom sessions. And after that when the children send their worksheets or when they send their pictures of what they have done the activities, she has to once again sit in front of the phone and correct it or, you know, tell me if there are mistakes, she has to point it out. She has to do all that and she sits more time in front of the device. So that is hard for any human being. To do that we have to make these worksheets to sit in front of the device. So it's actually affecting us also, maybe aside, maybe some teachers are getting headaches because they're sitting in front of the phone for a long, long time. Yeah.

55:13

Are there any advantages of being a union member during this time?

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Being a union member, yes, we actually got the chance via ACUT to attend a few workshops, especially a very valuable ones like workshop, then some of those workshops were really valuable for us. Though, I actually wish workshops were done for Sri Lankan teachers about zoom, those technicals things like workshops, should have been done, but That didn't happen. But workshops were done about teaching methods to develop, you know, to develop our knowledge, then how to cope up during the pandemic, then, workshops were done. And we even had some workshops about you know, other income, like how to earn other income, like something like a self employed employment because of preschools, some some of the preschools, I knew they were totally closed, because they had 10-15 students. And during the pandemic, those 10-15 students dropped out, and they didn't have a single student, they had to close the whole thing. So those teachers are deprived of salary, they lost their total income, some of them are single mothers, they had to earn for their families, and they lost the entire income, and they had to find another self employment. So one of the most useful is another useful workshop that we had was this self employment workshop where they taught us other methods like to earn an income, maybe like very incense sticks then making paper bags, then making cloth designs, printing on cloth, then we had a workshop on baking, then those type of workshops were very useful for us because we managed to get another income because of those workshops for those who can't specially have zero income from the preschools. So those were some of the benefits that we got from being union members.

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Did you feel stressed during these times? And how did you deal with it, and whom did you approach for support,

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we did feel a lot of stress, because as I told you, our workload has increased because earlier, we had, you know, we have different roles, when we go to preschool , preschool teacher, when we are at home, we're a mother, but now we are a preschool teacher, as well as a mother. So sometimes when I'm doing during my zoom session, my little one comes in front of me, I have to remember that I'm a mother, also, I can just, you know, Chase him off. So then, apart from that, I had to, you know, allocate My Time, My Time for the preschool. And then to manage all those preschool activities plus my family time also, I had to cook at home, I had to wash clothes, so we actually don't have a maid. So we have to do that those things ourselves. So all those workload, along with all and on top of that, we had to cope with the husband and the son being at home. So this husband also couldn't go to work because of the lockdown and the son can go to school. So they are feeling more stress. And that stress is also coming on top of us. We have to you know, somehow I found it really, really hard. I don't know the other teachers but I really found it very hard to you know, keep my keep my temper and you know, be the mother be The Good Wife, be the teacher be everything. So it was all I had to you know, some of some of the days I had to wake up early in the morning, which are the preschool work centers work, then get my son ready for his zoom classes, get his worksheets and do those worksheets because for that dose I have to stick with him. He's nine years old is small. So I had to do that and then I had to poke they know where to look after my husband and to look after wash the clothes then I look after my sons he sometimes home to spend time with me to you know, get a little bit of entertainment, maybe so for that process. I have to spend some time. So with all that there were times when I had to I had I got only a five hour sleep. So my husband is very helpful. He hear me But then there are things that he can't do. He can't he he can't cook But he can, he helps me to cook. So no matter what I have to stay there, then when comes my son's education, he is actually he is not able to teach my son, so that he couldn't help them brace for work, he actually can't help. So there are things that he was also feeling depressed, because he has over. He's just sitting and waiting. And he sees me working a lot, but he doesn't know what to do how to help me. So it was a lot of stress. And it was, you know, fighting all these depression along with the economical side also, we have a lot of financial issues. I used to have 30 students here, there is a maximum space, number of students I can have in my space. So these are third the income I got from 30 students decreased to 15 students during this pandemic, because 15 students dropped down, because they were not very comfortable with online education, they were not happy with it. The parents said that won't work out and they left. So only 15 students from those 15 students income to manage the family, which I heard earlier managed with an income of 30 students plus my husband's income. He was not paid during he does self employment. So if he didn't go to work, he doesn't get paid. This also added up to my stress. So with all that it was very stressful actually,

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whom did you approach for support? And did you face any difficulties in finding support?

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When it comes to support Actually, there was no, no place to go for support because almost everyone was struggling. So though, we couldn't get financial support, because everyone was struggling financially. There were some times when, like from the union, they gave us these food packs, I mean, these dry rations, so that was a support, which we got, but one pack will last for one week. So that was not, that was a support. But that was not sufficient to you know, take away our stress. So we can't just go and ask some other teacher for help us because they also struggling. But the biggest support we had was talking among the teachers, because each one told their problems. Each teacher spoke to another teacher which spoke our problems we spoke how stress free or bespoke how hard it was for us. So those type of winter support, there is psychological support we got from teachers, but then again, sometimes it's depressing to see all these issues, not only the teachers issues, even the parents issue, they come and tell us teacher this month I there's a piece to be I can't cannot be the face because my husband is having this type of situation. We don't have food to eat, we we can't even manage the food expenses, we have no way to pay the fees. So that stress also was added to us. So actually, there was no no much of a stress reliever, except for feels, you know, talking to friends. And for me Actually, one of the one of the advantages of this pandemic was that I got to spend a lot of time with my son and husband in the family in the home as a family because earlier, he used to go my son goes to school, my husband goes to work, I go to work. I mean, I go to the preschool, and then we meet up, we spend only a little bit of family time. But now because of the pandemic means we got a chance to spend a lot of family time. And more than me, my son actually enjoyed all that family time. Because for him, both his mother and father were working. So he didn't get, you know, time to spend with both of us. He was actually happy. He he got time to ride his bicycle, he got the favorite task. So sometimes he comes in causes to play and then we you know, go to play. So he also he, he got extended bedtime also early because he has to wake up early in the morning for school. He had to sleep early. So now he has a little bit of extension because he doesn't have to wake up early in the morning the next day. He got a little bit of extension and he was actually enjoying school. We also were happy with that. But then the stress.

1:04:42

How did your students and parents respond to the changes of online learning?

1:04:49

This students actually, when it comes to students, they they I think took up the challenge very well. They got used to this new, new normal move better than adults. Because the little ones they used to know, I know, they are very familiar with zoom, they caught up to move faster than us even more faster than some of the teachers. So they're very used to it sometimes like when I send worksheets on WhatsApp, they don't, you know, take a printout and they don't even bother to write it in the paper, they just, you know, take the pencil in the WhatsApp. And they they do the worksheet in WhatsApp in itself same. So the students, they put it up fast, and they got used to this system fast they refer to it. But as adults, we faced a little bit of hardships, especially when it comes to parents. Because just like in my home, in every room, they have several children and they have to specially the women at home, because they are all started to get more and more, more and more, more and more complicated and more and more busy. They had to you know, do all the work. Now, though, my husband is very helpful. And though he helped him book, some of these men in Sri Lanka, they don't, you know, even go to the kitchen, they just sit and tell their wives to do all the work. So she has to do the work for the husband, the family, the child education, the mother has to even become a teacher now. So that was something very hard for most of the parents was hard for them to become a teacher, because most of them don't know what to teach. They don't know how to teach, they don't know how best to teach. And what happened ultimately is like in the preschool, we know that okay, we will say we are introducing a color for the child, the child will gradually learn it. So we introduce a color and we take time, we give a lot of activities, we give a lot of related activities, we do a lot of interpretive teaching for the child to learn that color. But when it came to parents, when say, for example, we taught red color, they wanted the child to study read, to recognize a color and tell, this is red immediately. So they had to face a lot of a lot of hardships , they even pressured the child to learn. And when there was a lot of competition now, in the whatsapp group, all the completed parents, they send their worksheets and they send the videos. So all the other parents look at that some of the parents started calling me and asking teacher, my child is not doing this particular activity. But the other children in the group have done is my child v. What can I do to my child, so they started to get stressed, then I had to explain them that all the children have different different speeds of catching up, we can't expect all the child's will be the same. So it took some time for them to understand that until they understood, they start to get a lot of pressure. And sometimes, they still didn't understand that they still think that they want their child to do the best they want their child to do. They want their child to do a good job in the grow. So because of that sometimes they you know when it comes to when I tell them to color a picture and said, so the other children, they color it neatly, like without going outside the borders. So we'll say one parent can't get a child to do that they try to color and sell because they don't want the others to lose or look at their child and think that the child can do. So that type of things the parents still can't catch up, they still haven't realized that. Not all children are seen.

1:08:51

In what ways have the terms and conditions of employment changed during the pandemic? And what support Have you received from your school?

1:09:07

Actually, I am running the school so there is no support I get we didn't get any support from the government. We actually got 2500 rupees an allowance of 2500 rupees during the pandemic for the teacher that is one time payment, I think. So other than that we didn't get any other support. As head of the tea, preschool, I supported my teachers as best as I can, because the parents got the number of parents got reduced and the number of fees we get got reduced. It was a huge struggle to pay the salaries. But then still, I managed to somehow you know I do on a online classes I do external online classes, not the peaceful tickets for the higher grades to show So what I earn from that, even that I used to put in pay my teacher salaries so that I did for my teachers, and there were many preschools, who, who really struggled hard to pay the teacher salaries, and some of the preschools had to even, you know, pay, expelled their teachers, they had to tell their teachers to leave. So we actually don't have a system like that. Even the higher grade teachers that the formal education, school teachers, even they are not getting much of support. That is why they are on a strike, they are on strike for almost for one month. So those children, they don't have school, they the parents can't teach and the child has not seen these. So that is because they don't get the support, they actually need more support. We are not getting support from anywhere. That is the issue. Yeah.

1:10:58

With respect respect to your teaching? What are the things that is working for you? And what are the things that is not working for you now?

1:11:16

What works for me, I can say that I'm getting a satisfaction, sustained focus, I'm getting a satisfaction, because I actually love teaching, it's my passion. So I get a satisfaction when my child learn something when my child, you know, even even if it is just a pattern like this, if the child can write that pattern alone and send it so that is a huge satisfaction for me. So that is something that's worked out for me. That is what keeps me working, even in this harder situation, even in this difficult situation. That is what keeps me working. And that what works for me is the experience, the knowledge I get, and especially from these workshops, especially being a union member, I get the opportunity to do to participate in workshops, which are conducted worldwide. So, because of that, those are something that some things that I learned, there is no age for learning every lot our lives we can learn. So I keep learning sometimes not only from workshops, even from the kids, even from the kids, even through observing them through through experiences, I learn a lot of things. So that type of learning is something that worked out for me, especially the opportunities I get to do these workshops. And I, throughout the union, I managed not during the pandemic before the pandemic, I got an opportunity to do firstaid in firstaid, level three. So that is one more achievement for me something that worked out by being a teacher because I was a teacher, I became a member of the Union. Because I was a member of the Union, I got the opportunity to do that. So those type of things are things that worked out for me, what doesn't work out for me, I actually can't tell that nothing works. There's something that doesn't work out. Because this is my passion. And I love to do this job. I became a teacher because I love to love to become a teacher, I love being with the little one child, I enjoy being with them. So overall, overall, as a teacher, there's nothing that I lost because I became a teacher, even my son, I could bring him to my preschool in a very young age. And I he he got used to the preschool. So everything worked out for me, by being a teacher, everything worked out for me. There's nothing that the limbs work out. Even my husband he, he is very confident that I will any whatever decisions I take in the, in the in my son's education or in my son's life, he trusts me because he says that you are a teacher, people trust you and send their child to you. So you keep that trust. In that case, you can look after my house and also. So there is nothing that I didn't get as a teacher. Everything I got everything but only during this pandemic. I'm facing a little bit of hardship. When it comes to stress and financial difficulties if sitting I'm getting in this pandemic situation only it's hard. Other than that, as a teacher, I can say that I have. I have actually succeeded. I'm very happy that I became a teacher. It's worked out very well. So me. Yeah.

1:14:50

So during the pandemic, were there any challenges that you have been able to resolve and how did you resolve it?

1:15:09

As a teacher, the biggest challenge that I faced was the lack of income, the breakdown of income. Because I had, I had certain expenses of my own, everything broke down with a pandemic, the lack of income. And the other thing is I miss looking at children actually, that is my happy pill, looking at the children, looking at them, see them smile, see them, you know, do a little bit of you know, everything, everything I enjoy looking at everything that children do, even when it is something silly, even if they you know, even if they do something that is naughty, that can be considered not even if they break something, I enjoy looking at that because I, I see something in that. So I actually miss looking at the children, I miss spending time with them. So that is something that I missed because of the pandemic other than the financial difficulties that have faced.

1:16:11

So last few questions related to the future. So like, do you think the current mode of online teaching learning will continue in the future? Or like what will happen to digital learning technologies when schools reopen?

1:16:26

When it comes to continuing this method, personally, what I think is, it is very good to teach the children through this digital media because the children enjoy it. So I actually would love to have a screen installed in my preschool. And maybe, if let me let me first tell about that. We should screen something we are I can you know telecasts these videos. Because when when I'm teaching, it's like even a song if I can. Now these days, like, we we send videos of songs. So children learn really fast. So if if I can, you know, install a TV screen, and you know, make it possible like teaching with say the alphabets or the numbers like 123, what I feel is that is more more that will reach out the child more than like we use this teaching is the user will number one on a board. And if you use your flash flash card, but children are going to technique, they are more into games, they're more into the digital world. Today, more than showing a flashcard if I can show a digital screen, the child will definitely enjoy it and the child what I think is catching up really fast. And if I can install a digital board, where the child can, you know write in the board scribble in the board, right patterns, I feel that the child will catch up writing more faster, because now if you can see, even the infant, they quickly catch up using the phone, even an infant can, you know, go to YouTube and take a song at the very less young ages. My sister son she my sister's daughter, she's only one years old, but she can go get the song get the song she knows that I could. So they have become children have become very much digit digitalized and very much tech technical. So winning this system will be good, but we can't afford that. So I said it would be good. If I can do it, I would have done it. But after the week is finished, these digital systems will stop because I cannot install a television screen where all the children can see I cannot put a small one, I put a bigger one. So I actually can't explain that that much of money too. Especially after all these bankrupt situations. My all my life savings have been spent during these two years ago, one and a half, almost one and a half year gap to you know, manage my family and all that. So I'm with this situation, I can't afford to get a television or screen or whatever. If I can do it, I would have done it because I think that is a very good method to reach out to the children. The current generation is so much digitalized and technical.

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What do you think will be the main concerns regarding your work in the future? And also what ways will this pandemic bring changes to teachers everyday work in terms of working hours, contract terms and conditions and all?

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What I think is after the pandemic, I do feel in Sri Lanka the teachers will go back to the old situation, because they are waiting for the pandemic to be over to you know, go back and we have been opening up in between like I said, we we closed for six months, then we opened up for one month and then again we closed for three months, then again we opened up for one month, we have been opening in between and the moment we open we go back to the old systems, this will reopen the children come only thing is the only differences are sinks by installed in front. And the child has to you know, sanitize their hand or wash their hands with the with dishwashing liquid when they go into the when they go into the school. Other than that, there is no there's no big change. I do feel like I said like, even though we are we really want to have this digitalized system we can't afford. So what will happen is we will definitely go back to the old system once again. And when it comes to the contracts and the working hours and all that teachers are waiting for this pandemic situation to be over to go back to the previous the way they were, they are waiting to go back to that pre pandemic, the pre pandemic, whatever they were doing, so they will obviously be going for that situation.

1:22:07

So given the context where you work, what support Do you need for your work in the future?

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You mean during the pandemic or after the post pandemic situation?

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we actually do need a little bit of support, like I said, if we can get the support, we can you know, install these digital media and we can you know, continue this method this we have come up with a good method, we can continue with this good method, if we get support from maybe government or some organization which can help us with these media and on top of that, if we can get some support, because we are we have undergone a lot of losses, and not only me, almost all the preschools they have undergone this kind of financial crisis. So, if we are getting a support, we can, you know, do better in the future. Now, we have now that we have learned these digital methods, we can you know, go ahead with those methods, if we get the chance. But since we are not getting that chance, we cannot we cannot expect a huge change in the future, we will have to continue with what we are because we are not getting the support. If we are getting that support, we can change the system. And we can you know what we learn we can use it

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for last question is what kind of support do your students need to adapt better to learning in the future?

1:24:20

I do think that the students will need a lot of support. But as a preschool, some of the students won't be coming for us. coming to us, they've been leaving for formal education. So when when it comes to those who are not leaving many students who are coming we will have to actually do a few workshops with them. Not workshops in the sense like not for the not the ones we do for that. For the kids we will have to do some fun activities to bring bring back the socialization among them because they have been isolated for a long time especially with the lockdown the children can't even associate with the neighboring neighboring house. So, they have become very isolated. So, they are used to this now, we have to bring back the old gnomes, we have to do a few you know, workshops with like moral stories you know, teach them empathy teach them socialize, make them friendly with the others make them you know we have we will have to do all those kinds of workshops when for the parents we will have to you know, get them used to this new method, we will have to get them we will have to get them they are all like usually when you do something for more than 40 days you that becomes a habit for you that becomes a you know part of your daily routine and the change that the children will have even difficulties in the waking up time. Now, even my son he I like I said he has got an extended bedtime. So, once this situation changes, you will have to get used to the old ways. So, he will have to get back to back on track even we will have to get back on track we are used to know this digitalized ways we are used to you know use these zoom for class. So, we will have to get back to track going into these old methods. So, there is a lot of things that will have to undergo changes that we will have found sometimes part of these changes that we learned during this pandemics will stay with us continuously in the

1:26:38

back just a clarification what is the medium of instruction in your school?

1:26:43

My preschool we have English and Tamil or English and Sinhala so strange in Sri Lanka Sinhala and Tamil the main languages the languages of the country so some kids they go to a Sinhala medium school some kids they go to Tamil medium school some kids they go to English medium schools. So depending on the medium they are going we have a single a medium schools saw a single medium education single with English Tamil with English. Either way the parents chose whether they want singer or Tamil for the child.

1:27:17

Thank you so much for taking out your time and giving us answering all our questions. Thank you so much. most welcome. Thank you I'm so close the interview now and closes