



**The Brookings Institution  
Center for Sustainable Development**

**and**

**The Rockefeller Foundation**

**17 Rooms Podcast  
“Reimagining teaching and learning spaces”  
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*Episode Summary:*

In this fifteenth interview of the “17 Rooms” podcast, Elizabeth King and Urvashi Sahni discuss the power of learning teams and their efforts to move education systems beyond the one teacher, one classroom model. King, nonresident senior fellow at the Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution and Sahni, founding president and CEO of the Study Hall Educational Foundation, moderated Room 4 focused on Sustainable Development Goal number 4—on quality education—during the 2021 17 Rooms flagship process.

**MCARTHUR:** Hi, I'm John McArthur, senior fellow and director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Brookings,

**KHAN:** and I'm Zia Khan, senior vice president for innovation at the Rockefeller Foundation. This is 17 Rooms, a podcast about actions, insights and community for the Sustainable Development Goals and the people driving them.

John, I'm so looking forward to this conversation. We're still in the throes of COVID and the omicron wave has been hitting and a big issue has been school closures. And as people have been wrestling with this—parents and educators and policymakers—they're all trying to solve these problems of how do we get teachers back into the school? How do we get kids back into safe classrooms? And it seems that everyone's looking at this through the lens of how do we get back to the old system working? But it feels like it could be an opportunity to just rethink the whole system and really think about what are we trying to do in terms of learning outcomes and how can we help teachers who we ask so much of and maybe spread the load?

**MCARTHUR:** Yeah, the silver lining, maybe, of this pain that has been felt by so many families around the world with school closures and where people are fortunate enough online learning how to get things back to normal is maybe we should be thinking differently about what normal should look like. And an analog, which I think will come up today, is we think about our health systems, we think about health teams—we don't just think about a doctor, we think about a nurse, a nurse practitioner or a lab technician, other forms of clinicians, even community health workers who are crucial connective tissue to the system.

Well, maybe we should be thinking about learning systems and learning teams the same way and not putting all the burden on the teachers, as important as they are, but thinking about all the different functions and elements of success that are crucial not only within classrooms but also in broader parts of life. And this notion of learning teams is exactly what we'll be hearing about in today's episode.

Today, we're joined by Dr. Elizabeth King, or Beth King, and Dr. Urvashi Sahni to learn about their efforts to create a global coalition for learning teams. Beth is a nonresident senior fellow at the Center for Universal Education at Brookings. She was a global director of education at the World Bank from 2009 to 2014. An economist by training, her research includes topics varying from household investments in human capital to the linkages between education, poverty, economic development, to gender issues in development.

Urvashi is the founding president and CEO at the Study Hall Educational Foundation and also a nonresident fellow at the Center for Universal Education here at Brookings. She's a leading expert and practitioner in education, innovation, school governance, curriculum reform, and teacher training.

Beth and Urvashi co-moderate Room 4, a working group for SDG 4 on quality education in this year's 17 Rooms process. For new listeners, 17 Rooms is an approach to spurring action for the Sustainable Development Goals. It convenes 17 working groups, one per SDG, and asks them to focus on an area within that SDG that is ripe for action, and then to find some concrete next steps that can be achieved in 12 to 18 months to make progress. Zia?

**KHAN:** We're about to hear and see integration in action with Beth coming at this from a global policy angle and Urvashi coming at it from an on the ground practitioner perspective. Beth and Urvashi are co-moderators of Room 4, the working group for SDG 4 on quality education. This is their story.

**MCARTHUR:** Beth, welcome to 17 Rooms.

**KING:** Thank you, John. Happy new year.

**MCARTHUR:** Happy new year. And Urvashi, welcome warmly to you too.

**SAHNI:** Thanks, John, and happy new year to you, too.

**KHAN:** Thank you both so much for your leadership in this process and joining us here today. I wanted to start by asking you if you could tell our listeners about your journey, your personal journey, of how you came to be involved in education and how you came to 17 Rooms.

**SAHNI:** Yes, thank you. Zia. If someone had asked me when I was in school, what do you want to be? Teacher is the last thing I would have ever said. So and here I am, a professional educator. So what happened? Actually, I started my work, my journey, with gender, with working for women's rights as a women's rights activist. And what started me on it was really a personal tragedy. My own cousin was burned to death. It was one of those things they called dowry murders in the 1980s, and that shook me to my core.

And I founded an organization which was for women in distress. And it was through that that I started going and conducting workshops in schools with young women and young girls and colleges and went to their homes. And that's when I began to see how education had really short changed many of these girls.

But what set me on that was reflecting on my own education. I went to a great school. I finished very well. I did well. And then I was married very soon after. And I really couldn't find it in me to say no to this. And I looked back on that and thought about it and said, my education gave me great academic skills, but it didn't teach me an important lesson that I had the right to use these academic skills for myself. And that was such a deficiency in my education.

And it was thinking about that that led me to think about education and trying to redefine it for myself. And that's what started me on my journey. And I founded a school, with many questions, very few answers, but with a great willingness to learn. And it was along that way that I learned that education really needed to be transformed. It was a huge transformative force. But if we wanted it to live up to its potential to be an individual- and socially-transformative force, it had to be transformed.

And for years and years now, actually 36 years now, that I've been on my journey as an educator, and I have managed to marry my interest and my quest for gender equality along with that, because that's where it began.

And so our vision really of education, my organization is, to educate everyone for gender equality, social justice, personal flourishing, and to be an active democratic citizen, because I really believe that education can do all of these things. But for that, you need to transform what you teach, how you teach, and where you teach—all of it.

In terms of the 17 Rooms, my journey took me to Brookings, to the Center of Universal Education, and I became a nonresident fellow. And one day I received an invitation from you, I think, John, asking me if I would like to be moderate Room 4. And since one of my goals is to work at education in a broader global way, I jumped at the opportunity. And of course, I love Beth. I've heard a lot about her and I've met her several times as being part of Brookings. And so I was thrilled

at the opportunity to work with her, too. And it has been a great experience, so thank you for that, John and Zia both.

**KHAN:** Well, thank you so much for sharing your story. Beth?

**KING:** It's difficult to be to have a dramatic beginning as Urvashi, but I too was an activist when I was in high school, going to slum areas in Manila where I was born and I grew up. But it was clear to me, even then, that education has to play a role in improving people's lives. I realized not too long after I became an activist that joining my friends who went to the mountains to oppose the regime of Marcos was not the way I would do it. So I continued my education and got a Ph.D. in the US. And later I found myself at the World Bank, very different from where I started, certainly.

So, I'm trained as an economist. One of the last things I did at the World Bank, one of my last positions, was as a global director for education. And it was very clear to me that the path that the World Bank has to take with education, when we were developing the strategy for 10 years for the World Bank, would have to be changing education systems. And in that changing the way teachers are trained, their role in the classroom, in schools, has to be the first thing that we should do. And that's when we started to think about Learning for All. And that means changing also the role of teachers. So, the journey from the World Bank to Brookings, to the Center for Universal Education, was something that was consistent with my interests, even at the World Bank—universal education.

But the way to achieve universal education is by affecting the preparation of teachers, who teachers are, what they do. And it's very easy to see from the visits I made to many countries as a director that classrooms were completely crowded. When you have 50, 70, 100 students, pupils, in a classroom, those students are not going to learn, and the teacher is not going to be able to do a good job, no matter how talented the teacher. So we've got to rethink the way we define who the teacher is and who should be teaching those students. And this is how Urvashi and I came up with something that's actually not really a new idea, because many other organizations are thinking about it, which is learning teams rather than depending on just one teacher in the classroom. We need to think about meeting the needs of many, many students, and those are diverse needs.

**SAHNI:** One of the important things to change in the education system, and that's what I tried and that's what I've learned over my years with education, is that we also need to redefine what we mean by education. Even now, in many global networks, in many platforms that I've been part of globally, nationally, at a state level, education is still defined very, very narrowly as academic skills, really. And even when you have tests, even when there are laments about, oh children aren't learning, they're still talking about reading, writing, numeracy—the basic foundational skills. I think we need to go way beyond, that education, if we are to succeed with it, it really needs to be broadened and it needs to be looking at life outcomes more than learning outcomes, because we the goal of education is not just to know, but to learn to live. And so we've done a poor job of that.

While we are all lamenting that, oh, we haven't achieved SDG 4 because our kids don't know how to read, write, and do math, I think more importantly we should be worrying about the fact that we haven't done a great job about helping our students think about themselves, their relationship with the universe, and with others in it. We haven't been able to help them learn to learn themselves, others, and their planet. So I think the whole idea of education, the perception of it needs to change. And then through that lens, we work at how we train our teachers and learn to get them to see education differently as well.

**KING:** I think what we're trying to say as well in Room 4, Urvashi, is that those challenges are big ones for any one teacher, and that we need to actually think about the teaching team rather than just one teacher. The needs of students are diverse, as you have just said, that the challenge for the

teachers are also diverse and no one teacher, no matter how good, no matter how well-trained, can meet all of those needs. And that's why our discussions in Room 4 have been focused on learning teams. That means thinking about those challenges, the goals Urvashi mentioned, and being able to meet those by a team rather than just by one.

**MCARTHUR:** The two of you just gave us a seamless narrative from your personal journeys to the journey around learning teams, which I want to come back to in a moment for sure, because it's so important and compelling. But before we do so, I actually just want to dive in a little bit more on how your backgrounds come together. Because you mentioned that you both have a Brookings affiliation as nonresident senior fellows. For our listeners, Brookings is a big place. I think of it like a university with in-house scholars and external affiliated scholars, which the two of you are with our Center for Universal Education, which is kind of a sibling of our Center for Sustainable Development, and I'm a member of the Center for Universal Education, co-directors of the Center for Universal Education are part of our Center for Sustainable Development.

But the two of you, we've never had a chance really to work together because you're coming from these different perspectives. So it's been such a joy to get to know you both better through this process. And one of the things I find most compelling is that the two of you are respective titans in different domains of education. So, Urvashi, you're like a titan of doing it on the ground and building up a new approach to schooling. And Beth, you're a titan of the global education policy debates. For our listeners, the World Bank is the world's largest global development funder of education systems around the world, so it has a huge role in defining these debates. It's kind of like the finance ministry and the business entrepreneur working together. You're like the education policy person and the education entrepreneur working together. How does that connect? And how seamless or common is that connection for two people from such complementary backgrounds to come together on these debates? Because I think that's something our listeners might be interested in, just a difference of perspectives you bring to these issues.

**SAHNI:** When I was describing this to my friends and family, what are you doing in Room 4? And so I would tell them that, well, this is what we are doing, and I would talk about Beth. And they asked exactly the same questions, How do you work together, what do each one of you bring? And here's what I thought. I thought that coming from India and living and working there, and also working a lot with girls and girls' education, and gender equality, and in one of the poorest parts of India for a long time. And having thought about these issues while I was doing my Ph.D. at Berkeley and even and I was a resident at Brookings, I think what how it worked was that I would be bringing in the practitioner's perspective, what goes on the ground and with examples from a variety of places. I would also be calling attention to girls and gender repeatedly. And also pointing out, in fact, several times the problems that lack of resources and under-resourced countries bring, that they face, and how do you deal with those and how does this idea fit in with that.

And what I thought Beth brought continuously, which was such a great thing, the broader perspective, the global perspective. And also even in the Room 4, she pulled together an amazing lot of people from the global community of education, Manos from the GMR and professors, et cetera. And I brought in policymakers from India and school people and people who work with gender like Erin from Echidna Giving and one of the co-founders of Room to Read before that.

So I think what worked very well, and you put it so well, John, was the combination of a practitioner and thinker perspective, and particularly a focus on gender, which has been the cross-cutting theme and I'm so delighted that you did that across the 17 Rooms. And also from a perspective from a country like India—which if you can, by the way, solve the problem in India I think we've done a lot for the world. And from Beth, who has a lot enormous experience working on the global scene.

So I think that's what we brought, and it really worked very well in my mind where we were continuously pushing each other and pulling each other back and then adding and supplementing each other. And many times when we spoke, even when we'd have our prep calls, it was all, oh, that's such a great idea and I hadn't thought, and all that was so wonderful. So it was continuously finding ways of bringing things to the table that the other might have missed.

**MCARTHUR:** Beth, I'm curious, how does that resonate with you having this global perspective that you bring? And just for our listeners, how common is it, the ability to work on a joint project with this? It's a sincere question, I'm not looking for compliments. But is this a type of thing that's common, or is it something that we need to do more of do you think?

**KING:** It's hard to be global without actually knowing what's happening on the ground. The way to come up with a strategy for education, and that's what I led for the World Bank in my last position there, was really fed by my experience in various countries. The first country that I visited for the World Bank was Bangladesh. And it wasn't just about talking with ministers, it was actually also visiting schools and classrooms and understanding what it was like. Urvashi talked about gender, and one of the things that I saw there was really the divisions between boys and girls.

One of the most important projects I was involved in was actually the secondary school fellowship for girls, and a joint-parade of fathers and their daughters celebrating the impact of that project. And it began in a few *upazilas*, the districts, and then became a national project.

And I visited schools in China and saw how teachers managed a large classroom. How do does one teacher manage a large classroom and make sure that each child reads and does numbers? So it's years of being able to go to do projects, even as I was doing my research, because I was a researcher, but also just being able to see what's going on.

It wasn't so different from Urvashi's experience with looking at classrooms. We also share a passion for gender issues. Seeing how girls can be at the back of the classrooms, or don't have latrines of their own, and how they have to go and run to their homes in order to use the washroom. So many of those things were very important to me. In fact, I wrote the first policy research report on gender issues and development.

So my background was also on gender, by the way, and not just education, and how these two topics come together and how if countries want to improve their education, really, universally, they'll have to deal with the problems that affect girls, both in their homes when their parents don't think it's worth sending them to school, as well as in the classrooms when teachers interact differently with boy students and girl students. So, these two topics are very, very important.

**MCARTHUR:** I have great frustration at the world's long standing inability to tackle gender equality in education, especially secondary education. Which is in my view, I just want to say for our listeners, one of the most unaddressed issues in the world relative to what could be done. And we have, of course, famous leading lights like Malala drawing attention to this. But I do believe countries around the world need to do better. But in that context, we need to talk about learning teams and, Zia, I think, has some questions take us in that direction.

**KHAN:** Thanks, John. I want to pick up on your phrase around what could be done. I used to spend a lot of time working on teams in a different context, and one of the most important questions was what is the purpose of the team, or what outcome are you looking for from the team? And so I wanted to ask Beth and Urvashi, in terms of outcomes, where do you see are the biggest gaps or

failings in the outcomes of current educational models? And how could learning teams be a fix for those gaps?

**SAHNI:** I alluded to that a little earlier, that the current system, first of all, even the narrow way in which learning outcomes are defined as basic foundational skills, which is really what is vastly prevalent right now, even that is lagging behind so that there are so many children out of school. According to the Education Commission there are 260 million out of school. And even the 600 million that are in school, the learning outcomes leave much to be desired.

But more importantly, I think, the current state of affairs is that even where we have defined learning more holistically to include social and emotional learning, to make it learner-centric, and to include an approach where you are teaching students to look at themselves and their relationship with the universe and others in it—even there we are lagging behind in addressing that because we haven't yet moved to a holistic way of looking at teaching, at the teaching workforce. But when you have such a broad idea of learning, which we should have, first of all, we need to do that. So before we even look at the current learning outcomes, we should look at the current definition of learning, which needs to become much broader.

So in forums like the UN and Brookings, et cetera, we have defined it holistically. But at the same time, when it comes down to education systems or governments, not many of them are defining them that holistically. So we need to change that first of all, and then given that, then those are the learning outcomes that you have. And even those we're not be able to meet.

And to my mind, where that brings us to learning teams is so much has changed in the world, so much has changed in the world. And yet we still lived with the old idea of one teacher, one classroom. And while we are changing the way we define learning, we aren't changing the way in which we look at teaching. And so it's important that they stay in sync. So if you want to have learning outcomes that are broader, deeper, more holistic, then we need to have a teaching workforce that is more expansive, comprehensive, that includes more people. It takes a village to raise a child. That's an age old thing, and we all understand that. So why didn't we move from that to thinking of how it takes a village to educate a child?

So in fact, in terms of what we're looking at with the kind of outcomes that we are hoping for as we think of learning teams is, we're hoping that we can really achieve the learning outcomes that a broader definition of learning aims for by diversifying and making our own teaching workforce more comprehensive, just broader, including more people in it, including community workers, including other professionals, including parents, alumni, siblings.

And there are many examples all over the world where this has been done. There's CAMFED for example, where they use alumni who work as a great bridge and make sure that girls stay in school and they are empowered. Then there's Pratham in India, which is using community to support the early childhood. And there's SHEF, my own organization, where we're building a combination of alumni, of local facilitators, and equipping them and helping them digitally. So there are digital hybrid teams, digital and people on the ground. And there are several, I can mention so many examples, and they have great outcomes.

Even in terms of gender in education, John, that you mentioned, there is some movement towards thinking about gender, including more girls and making them equal and treating them equally in school. I think what there isn't a focus of is thinking about gender equality generally, that trying to use a feminist approach even in our curriculum helping them look critically at patriarchy, at patriarchal systems, and try to redefine themselves in terms of that in more egalitarian terms.

So, we are looking at a variety of outcomes that we think the learning teams approach can achieve, which are currently lacking hugely. So not just reading, writing, but even in the broader way in which we define learning.

**KING:** We hope that teachers will not think erroneously that our emphasis on learning teams takes away from the importance of the teacher in the classroom. Not at all. And we're not at all saying that the policies to improve the training, recruitment, compensation of teachers are not important. They are.

But we also know that a single teacher, we are expecting impossible things from them. When you look at developing countries where a classroom is not just about 15 students, you can have as many as 100 pupils there wanting to learn and one teacher to teach them. Just to add to what Urvashi said, an example—two people whom we brought to Room 4, one is, she's mentioned, CAMFED, and that's Lucy Lake, who is the co-founder of that, and a very important project for understanding that we have to bring more people into the classroom, more people into the school dealing in particular with helping secondary school girls who might be about to leave school because their needs in school are not being met. Another person we brought into Room 4 is Carol Basile, the dean of the Arizona State University School of Education. And Carol is leading the campaign to change the way schools are organized in Arizona, and it is about learning teams. It's about introducing the way schools are organized. And they've been evaluating the impact of their work and have been finding very positive effects, and they're now being asked to look at California as well.

So the challenges of teachers, the one teacher in the classroom, is not just in poor countries, it's also in the U.S. and other developed countries. So the approach of learning teams could be a revolution in how education systems are organized. You will note, for example, that in the health system, the physician is a scarce resource given all the demands in health. And so the physician is helped by a slew of professionals, not just volunteers, but professionals who are trained to be a physician assistant, a nurse practitioner, and so forth and so on. And it's hard to understand why, given the big challenges in education systems, why we insist on one teacher to meet all the learning needs of 50, 70 pupils in a classroom. We need to think differently, especially given what we've faced during the pandemic.

**KHAN:** Thinking differently is such a great opportunity for 17 Rooms. And so I'm curious now if you and Urvashi could describe, how did you use the Room in the process to advance this idea of learning teams, and what are your plans or actions coming in the next 12 months?

**SAHNI:** To just also take off from where Beth left off about thinking differently and how the pandemic really provided you great examples. So all the age old ways in which we did education just stopped working. Right? Schools shut down. And we've always thought of education as happening in schools, in classrooms, one teacher, one classroom. And so now suddenly there were no classrooms and schools were shut down. Children were at home. So what happened was that the learning space moved and along with that, there came into place many teachers. So there was one teacher, but then there were parents who were helping, and where parents couldn't help because they weren't educated enough, there were older siblings that were helping or there were local volunteers were facilitating as we had done.

And what we found was that everybody was moving in to help educate children and it was actually working better. So we really used that as a springboard to show that we really need to move away from that idea. And then, as Beth mentioned, we had Carol who had been conducting this experiment, and many of us, there was Lucy, myself, there was Erin Ganju. There was had since then many people there and Amy from the Education Commission who had been thinking and talking about this idea of diversifying the teacher workforce, of understanding that actually, that's



key. If we can transform the teaching workforce, then we can transform education systems. And so it was really very important to think about that. So in that, actually it didn't take much time, there were no naysayers. Everyone was on board.

Where there was a lot of debate and questions was in terms of resources that are we saying that we need to now hire more people to form these learning teams? What are we saying and how does that work in countries like India and in Africa? And so there we were clarifying that it didn't mean hiring more people. It meant reorganizing the system, including more volunteers, and actually making sure that the leadership understood that you need a different way of leading the teaching workforce so that we could include even the other people who were already there in schools, within schools, outside schools, within districts, that how do you re-coordinate, reorganize the system so that it functions as a team? So it doesn't necessarily mean more resources, because that was a great concern. And Beth, when you were talking about one teacher to one hundred children, I've been in schools in India where there are 400 students and two teachers. And then of course, there are students that are pitching in, volunteers that are pitching in. And all you have is two rooms and two trees, and that's how they are seated. So, people were a little alarmed that, hey, does this mean that we need more resources? So we discussed that a lot. But everyone seemed to be echoing that this was important, that maybe this was the way to go. And if you were going to think differently, then we need to think differently about the teaching workforce and what we're doing with that.

**KING:** You know, John and Zia, I love the idea of the 17 Rooms because you said focus on one idea. And it allowed Urvashi and me to bring together a group of people who may not be brought together exactly in the same Room by some other organization or in some other conference. But really, it was to bring together people like Carol Basile and Michael Feuer—Michael Feuer is the dean of the College of Education at GW—who are thinking about the education systems. We brought in Sudarno Sumarto of Indonesia because Indonesia is a huge school system, so we need to think about different school systems and to what extent learning teams would apply to those. We brought in Lucy Lake, who has been working on different countries in Africa, on bringing girl learner guides. We brought in Heather Simpson, who is from Room to Read who is the operations director there. And one of the projects she guides has to do with adolescent girls. And then Manos Antoninis, who is the director of the Global Monitoring Report of UNESCO, because we want this idea not just to be a discussion idea, but really also to start getting into the mainstream discussion and education. And what better way to do that than to have a real discussion of that in the Global Education Monitoring Report?

So, we were trying to use the Room 4 also as a way to convince people who have responsibilities in the education world and who can actually take the ideas there. So what we're hoping for is we can build a coalition, a global coalition around learning teams. And the challenge for Urvashi and me right now is to see who will take this up. It's not a joke to build a global coalition. So we're going to take baby steps towards that, bringing in more and more people, having people discuss the idea. Hopefully, getting teachers in a big way to support it because it is actually an idea to help teachers do their jobs better.

**MCARTHUR:** As we think about the evolution of this norm, I would describe two things maybe just taking a step back. One is creating a new norm on what the ultimate staffing situation is for a group of learners. But then the other is, I would say task shifting. You mentioned the health sector analog, Beth, and a lot of the debates there have been around how to build task shift for health systems so that you get as many people allocated as efficiently as possible to the right tasks and even community health workers and so forth have been a huge piece of that in low resource settings, but also high resource settings now, too.

What are the next steps that you think in a debate that is often so localized? Education really comes down to even a local teacher's union and their debate with the government and parents in a city or in a province or in a state. What do you see as the path to creating this new norm? Is it about getting a place to do it at scale? Is it about kind of taking some of these new examples that some of the academics who've been working on? How do we think about a path to success?

**KING:** That's a really hard question, John, and we have we have discussed that. That's one reason why it was good to actually bring a very different group of people, not just people who work in international organizations, but people who are close to the where teachers are trained. To bring to bring thinkers and people who think about education systems. We brought in Rachel Hinton from the UK development agency because she has basically shepherded, guided, motivated a big research project funded by the FCDO for thinking about education systems. You gave us the opportunity to bring together many different people who we hope can motivate and continue to compile the research that would underlie a movement towards this norm that you talked about. Because that is the norm that we hope we can reach.

When I started to think about this reimagining the teacher workforce, I went to the UNESCO database to look at who are considered to be part of the workforce in education. It's teachers, and teachers alone really. It's so different when I went to the WHO website, and there the workforce is considered to be the capital of the sector. And I would like, my dream is for education to think about a big group of people who we need, community volunteers, but not only, real professionals who are going to be helping children learn. It will take, as you said, bringing along teachers unions who will not feel threatened by this idea of learning teams, who will think about this as really a way to realize, here is a chance for them to realize that we know the challenge of the one teacher in the classroom is a huge one, and that we understand that learning teams is a way to help teachers in the classroom meet the tasks that are in front of them. And we hope Brookings, we hope the Center for Universal Education will help us bring this idea forward and spread it, debate it, and hopefully bring more people to the table.

**SAHNI:** So I think in terms of next steps, as Beth mentioned, we need first of all to harness all the lessons that the pandemic has taught, and people have been using the learning teams approach. And I'll give you an example that we have these Community Teaching Centers, my own organization in U.P., Uttar Pradesh, and they were 25 before it started and now there are 104. And that's because they found that it worked so well. These are community-based centers who are supported digitally by professional teachers. And there are local facilitators, all women, who then take over. And there are not one but two. And so there's this digital team that's functioning, and they found that it really works very well.

So I think many of these examples have sprung up which people want to keep because they're also more cost effective in several cases. And also, this is an opportunity because governments are asking how can we do things better, where we can push for more debate, more visibility for the idea through Brookings. Learning Planet is having a festival in January to commemorate the International Day of Education and where we put together a panel from Room 4 where we are planning to talk about learning teams and get more people talking about it. And also, Manos from GMR is intending to focus on this in the next year,

We need more evidence that this works, that it actually helps us achieve SDG 4. It helps governments achieve their own goals for education. So, more visibility, more evidence, more people working together, and in fact, more learning themes even in the global thinking community, the community that thinks about education. I think that's the next step forward. And once again, trying to get people to look at the problem differently. How can we do this? Well, let's look at the

problem differently, let's redefine the question, and then try and work out a systems change through that.

**KHAN:** Unfortunately, we have to bring this fascinating conversation to a close. It's been so interesting as you've laid out the context of how the pandemic created an opportunity to think differently, how you with your experiences and working with the Room have sharpened this idea of learning teams, and you've charted a course forward. I was wondering if we could close with each of you sharing an answer to the question: if it's 2030, what would you want to see in place, concretely, that would signal that we've made real progress with learning teams? If you could each share a brief thought with our listeners on that, that would be fantastic.

**SAHNI:** So if it's 2030, here's what I would love to see. I would really love to see distributed teaching and learning spaces, first of all, so that learning happens not just in classrooms, but in communities at local centers everywhere. I would like to see the content of learning change as well, where people are thinking about learning more broadly, and that will happen when you include a diverse teaching force. Because then everyone brings their own perspective. So I would love to see this whole idea of it takes a village to educate a child happen—in villages, in schools, in communities, everywhere. And I'd love to see people think about education differently. Think about it not just in a narrow academic skills approach, but in a way in which you're thinking about gender equality, you're thinking about social justice, and children are learning how to deal with all the problems of climate change, of gender justice, of race in the classroom and discussing it critically, actively, dynamically so that learning itself is transformed. That's what I would love to see happen by 2030.

**KHAN:** Thank you so much. And Beth, how about yourself?

**KING:** 2030, Zia, it's not very far away. And if we want to change systems, we've got to start now. What I would like to see is a change in the numbers that we often hear—60 million children not learning the basics, not being able to read a complete sentence, not understanding, not being able to do math. We want to be able to change those numbers and bring those numbers down. I would like the statement, “Schooling is not learning,” to be that we will say schooling is learning, and schooling is learning for all. That means girls, that means children from remote communities, poor sections of countries. Schooling has to mean something. And the way to do that is to adopt this approach of learning teams so that teachers don't say they're overworked, underpaid, that they will receive, that they receive the support they need to meet the learning needs of all the children who are in school. That would be what I'd like to see or at least a movement towards that, we need to be able to move the needle towards that.

**MCARTHUR:** Well, this has been an amazing conversation. Thank you, Urvashi and Beth, both for what you've done in the Room, with all your colleagues, and I'm so glad you're able to talk about the range of people who came together here. And it seems a special gathering, even if there are many of these debates ongoing, it does seem a special conversation that you've curated, so thank you for that. Thanks more broadly for everything you're doing in the world to keep these issues moving forward, and we feel so privileged to be able to have been part of your journey here. So a huge thanks from Zia and myself and the full 17 Rooms team for all your leadership in carrying this forward.

Zia, such an interesting conversation, because the issues that Beth and Urvashi are working on are so fundamental to the way our societies work. But the policy levers are ultimately pretty complex to get there. And this notion of building new norms is crucial, but also extremely hard on a planning basis. What do you make of this?

**KHAN:** Exactly, John, and I think the approach will balance that tension of it's a new norm, it's a new paradigm, how can they get critical mass behind that way of thinking? But a global coalition, as they've been describing, will allow for lots of local innovation and local application to local contexts. And as you always remind me, education is one very highly context dependent issue, and it needs to get very localized. So I'm excited to see how they take this forward.

To learn more, find this episode at Brookings Dot Edu Slash 17 Rooms podcast. Coming up next, Room 11 with Jamie Drummond and Kennedy Odede on the importance of locally led development and the actions donors can take to support it.

**MCARTHUR:** I'm also pleased to announce a new podcast from our colleagues in the Africa Growth Initiative here at Brookings: Foresight Africa, a new podcast to celebrate Africa's dynamism and explore strategies for broadening the benefits of growth to all the people of Africa. You can learn more at Brookings Dot Edu Slash Foresight Africa podcast.

I'm John McArthur.

**KHAN:** And I'm Zia Khan, and this has been 17 Rooms.

**MCARTHUR:** Our thanks go out to the guests you heard today, and also to the production team, including Fred Dews and Alexandra Bracken, producers; Jacob Taylor, associate producer; Gaston Reboredo, audio engineer, and Nicolette Kelly, audio intern. The show art was designed by Katie Merris. Additional support comes from Shrijana Khanal, Ian McAllister, Soren Messner-Zidell, Andrea Risotto, Marie Wilkin, Chris McKenna, Esther Rosen, David Batcheck, and Caio Pereira at the Brookings Institution, and Nathalia dos Santos, Sara Geisenheimer, Hunter Goldman, and Miranda Waters at The Rockefeller Foundation.

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