



Building An Academic Playground

Shalini Nair

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Perur, Coimbatore

Teaching: Threat or
Catalyst?

Should Teacher
Education
Curriculum Be
Made More
Inclusive?

'Active' Teachers.

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What Does Independence Mean To Us?

■ RASHMI MARIAN FURTADO

Senior Editor, TeacherTribe.world



I have been pondering over this question for many years now. For me as an individual, independence has a deeper meaning. There are several aspects of my life that have truly made me independent. And I believe it may be along the same lines for many of us.

Financial independence, professional independence, emotional independence and mental independence are the most important forms that are important for a person to truly become independent. As educators, all that we are trying to do is help our students achieve these levels of independence. Education equips our students with all the above-mentioned levels. Our freedom fighters put a great deal of effort to make sure we live in a free country. But with that gift they also left us with a responsibility of ensuring that each and every individual is educated and is truly independent. And it's upto us educators to make their dream come true. The responsibility of making every child independent is upto us.

Teachers are huge influencers for students. You can truly make a difference in their lives. As educators, there are several measures we can take to ensure this dream is realised. I will be discussing a few in this article.

Ability to make their own decisions. It's always easier for us and the students when we take decisions for them. It's easier because usually we are aware of the right path to take. It would be easier for the students

because they simply have to follow and not worry about the risks attached to the decision. But doing this will not make a student independent. If they learn how to make their own decisions, it will help them tremendously.

Encourage the students to ask more questions and ignite curiosity. Children always have a lot of curiosity in them.

As they grow older, this curiosity starts diminishing. How many times do we, as adults, go the extra mile to find out more information because of our curiosity? How often do we question things around us?

It's important for us to encourage our students to ask questions and also go the extra mile to find more information. When an individual is well informed, the likelihood of them taking the right decisions is high. This also adds to the confidence levels of the students as they are aware of their surroundings. So, keeping the curiosity alive is absolutely necessary.

Teach them goal setting. A child's mind is usually not very focussed. Teaching them goal setting will help them stay focussed and declutter their mind from aspects that can waste a lot of their time. Goal setting can be taught to a child at a level that they can relate to. Starting with short term and easier goals will help. Small wins will motivate them to do better.

Reiterate importance of learning. As educators, we always talk about how important learning is. But somewhere down the lane our focus changes from learning to scoring higher marks in examinations. While I am not saying that the focus shouldn't be on higher marks, it's important that we don't lose the focus from learning. In fact, it's important for all of us to be lifelong learners.




All of the above-mentioned measures are vital for a student to learn,

It's important for us to encourage our students to ask questions and also go the extra mile to find more information.

so they become independent when they grow up. India has reached the southern pole of the Moon, an achievement accomplished only by a handful countries in the world. Our independence is visible in our achievements - big and small. The landing on Moon, is an excellent example of the same.

Here's wishing that all of us achieve independence in it's true essence. ■



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 @rashmimfurtado
 Rashmi Furtado

A natural writer, teacher and a passionate content creator, Rashmi has authored the Cu and Rio series and created the Keystones program on Values Education from Greycaps Knowledge Tribe. She is one of the founders of TeacherTribe.world. She is a sought after speaker at educational conferences, facilitator programs and for motivational talks to students at schools across India. She holds a Master's Degree from the prestigious NIT Suratkal where she also taught before joining Greycaps Knowledge Tribe. Rashmi is also a popular quiz host for schools, colleges and large corporate audiences. She has co-hosted the Tata Crucible quiz, Canara Bank National School Quiz, Travel Quest by Thomas Cook and QNOW it ALL? World Teachers Quiz.

Should Teacher Education Curriculum Be Made More Inclusive As Learning Science?

■ G. BALASUBRAMANIAN

G. Balasubramanian is a doyen of school education in India. He has held several positions of leadership at CBSE, including Director Academics. He was the brain behind the introduction of several innovations at CBSE, which included frontline curriculum, communicative approach to language teaching, Information Technology, alternatives to homework, etc. He is also an author, poet and a sought-after speaker at educational conferences world over. This article has been taken from G. Balasubramanian's LinkedIn Page.



There has been enough debate time and again, and in several forms, about the design and content of the teacher education curriculum in the country. Without doing any forensics on what has been on the structure and purpose of the same over the years, it is time to acknowledge that unless we move on to a design that meets the needs of the futuristic learning needs, the enlarging universe of knowledge compelling learners to engage with newer learning methods, styles and the tools. It must be understood that the integration of technology is not the singular tipping point for any new advocacy or a redefined goal. It could be just one of the several components for the teacher education curriculum.

The first principle of teaching advocated by Sri Aurobindo, “The first true principle of teaching is that nothing can be taught,” had raised several eyebrows who quarreled with their own selves while trying to

understand the implication and depth of such a powerful statement.

As the research in neuro-cognitive sciences advanced, the above statement stands vindicated. Essentially, the focus in the classroom turns to learning and enabling it through an appropriate environment that nurtures and facilitates learning. That calls for a different role for the teacher in the classroom as a human resource developer.

The core of the current curriculum in teacher education still appears to be based on the needs defined in the industrial model of large scale reproduction of the products and services. It fails to address the life-spirit of the learner that is seeking, curious, communicative, researching, growth-oriented and liberating. The approach to standardisation of learning as a common norm denies the learner the basic freedom to learn, grow and seek the unfathomed oceans of knowledge and experiences in the journey of life. Further, the current teacher education curriculum prepares the teachers to create a predefined learning environment that is compelling, competitive and curtailing any extended learning even within the designed corridors of the learning environment. Hence, **the fundamental vision of the teacher education curriculum might call for a fresh thinking which is inclusive, imaginative and contextual to a community notwithstanding its relevance to a universal expansion and advancement of the human spirit and knowledge.**

It is, therefore, time to relate teaching to the core findings of brain sciences embracing the understanding from the fields of neurobiology, neuro-cognition, neuropsychology and neuro-plasticity. That would indeed mean a cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to our understanding of the process of learning. The fact that learning is impacted by hormones, emotions and other socio-cultural needs warrants re-calibrating the curriculum beyond the data-driven approach. Preparing the teachers to the essentials of this holistic understanding of the process of learning beyond textual materials, support systems and assessment needs, appears important without

any further delay. The emergence of the 'learning sciences' as a research area to understand the interdisciplinary impacts on learning comprising several facets of inter-linked knowledge systems appears to be profound.

“The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.”

—Sydney J. Harris

Its inclusive approach with cognitive sciences, neurosciences, technology, design thinking, psychology and pedagogy with allied learning systems might give a deeper understanding of the process and dynamics of learning. It may be a gateway to understand the vistas of personalised learning of a learner so 'no one size-fits all.'

“The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.”

- Sydney J. Harris ■

Building An Academic Playground

■ **Shalini Nair**
*Founder Principal,
Kikani Global Academy (KGA)
Perur, Coimbatore*



Ms. Shalini Nair has experience in teaching and administration, spanning 14+ years. She has a Master's Degree in English Literature and a Bachelor of Education Degree. She specialises in teaching English Language, Psychology and Career. Along with that, she has expertise in Psychological Counselling and is a trained career counsellor.

An eloquent speaker and trainer, Shalini has spearheaded international programmes in partnership with various schools, pan India and abroad, on SDG projects. She recently connected her school, KGA, to a new digital journaling pilot program with 20 local elementary schools in Taiwan called, 'Responsible Digital Citizens Program', a part of #Envision2030 SDG Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals. She possesses transferable management experience and skills, recently endorsed and developed via the HARVARD CSML leadership and Management training and certification in 'Leading Change' in 2022.

Shalini Nair is presently the Founder Principal of Kikani Global Academy, Coimbatore.

One morning, as I was scrolling through twitter, oops, X now, I came across a tweet by Steven Weber. "When you observe students on a playground, you will see collaboration, communication, critical thinking, teamwork, problem solving, citizenship, innovation and community.

We need more academic playgrounds.” I was suddenly attracted by this term ‘Academic Playground’. The concept of transforming traditional classrooms into more interactive and dynamic spaces, kept me thinking. Can we create an engaging and collaborative learning environment that goes beyond the traditional lecture-style teaching?

My thoughts took me to Finley’s (2014) words, in classrooms, *“allowing productive struggle to occur consumes more class time. But retention is undermined when learning is frictionless. Purposeful struggle today means less re-teaching tomorrow.”*

So, if we could convert the classrooms to meaningful playgrounds within the four walls, students are more likely to excel. As we know, some factors that drive engagement are – autonomy, belonging, competence, purpose, fun and curiosity. Let’s look into some of the best practices that could be incorporated into an ‘academic playground’ -

Flexible Seating: Instead of fixed rows of desks, consider using movable furniture that can be rearranged to accommodate different learning activities. This allows for easy group discussions, presentations and collaborative projects.

Technology Integration: Incorporate technology tools such as interactive whiteboards, tablets and multimedia displays to enhance the learning experience and encourage active participation.

Collaboration Zones: Designate specific areas for group work and collaboration. These zones can be equipped with tools that facilitate brainstorming, idea sharing and project planning.

Hands-on Learning Stations: Create stations with hands-on activities or experiments related to the subject matter. This provides students with a tangible way to explore concepts and apply theoretical knowledge.

Interactive Displays: Use digital displays or projection screens to

showcase student work, display relevant content or provide visual aids during lectures.

Discussion Corners: Design spaces that encourage open discussions and debates. Comfortable seating arrangements can foster a more relaxed and open atmosphere for intellectual exchanges.

Adaptable Layouts: Design the space to be modular, allowing for quick changes in layout to suit different teaching and learning styles.

Natural Lighting and Aesthetics: Incorporate natural lighting and aesthetically pleasing elements to create a more welcoming and inspiring environment.

Gamification Elements: Introduce gamification elements to the learning environment, such as interactive quizzes, simulations or educational games.

Outdoor Learning Spaces: If feasible, consider integrating outdoor areas for classes or activities, connecting learning with the natural environment.

Student Choice and Autonomy: Give students some control over their learning experiences, allowing them to choose topics, projects or activities that align with their interests.

Teacher as Facilitator: In this environment, teachers take on the role of facilitators and guides, fostering discussions, providing guidance and encouraging exploration.

We should always remember that the design of an academic playground should be guided by the specific needs of the learners, the subject matter and the educational goals. It is important to balance creativity and functionality to ensure that the space remains conducive to learning and engagement. Happy teaching! ■

'Active' Teachers

■ S. Indira Narayan

Educator

S. Indira Narayan is an educationist with more than 35 years of rich experience in the teaching field. She has held multiple portfolios. She has been associated with St. Ann's High School, ICSE, ISC, Secunderabad, for over three decades, teaching English language and English literature for classes 10, 11 and 12. The last portfolio she held was as Academic Coordinator, St. Ann's High School, at Kompally Hyderabad, under the same management.



Indira Narayan has conducted numerous workshops for school teachers and continues to do so. She is also interested in writing and blogs regularly on - <http://vinplaksha.wordpress.com/>

One single word 'active' can mean many things. The basic ground is, being 'characterised by action'. An 'Active Teacher' is a teacher who is alert, observant, committed, involved, tolerant, positive, understanding, thorough in her subject, affable, active...and the list goes on.

"Children, did you understand?" is a regular refrain in a regular class. This comes after the teacher has taught or explained some lesson. "Yes ma'am," is the general chorus, which includes an enthusiastic response, a nod of the head, sometimes positively, sometimes non-committal and a few blank stares. If we take time to study these responses, we will find that there will be quite a few students who join the chorus even if they have not understood what has been taught. The non-committal nods come from those who go along with the flow for reasons known to

them. Joining the peers is important for some; some fear being thought of that they lack the intelligence to understand, and a few fear the teacher's oft heard remark, "I have explained the lesson twice; did you not pay attention?"

The purpose of what I wrote above is to say that an active teacher is one who pays attention to these details. She has learnt to understand the assimilating capacity of her students, making a mental chart of those who grasp the lesson, those that are slow and those who do not understand most of the lesson taught. Time permitting, she may repeat the lesson, this time a bit more slowly.

Active teachers take effort to plan and explain complicated ideas in a simple way.

A teacher completely dedicated to teaching, to education per se, interested in the all-round progress of her students, is definitely an active teacher. To deserve this title, she requires more than just academic prowess; she needs to have several skills and qualities too (some mentioned at the beginning of this article).

Right from the time a teacher enters her class, a positive attitude and a positive presence in her should be visible enough to go across to her students and influence them. This does not mean that she should not be serious in her teaching. If a teacher is happy to teach, she will have a receptive group of children in her class. A well prepared lesson aids her happiness. When students listen with apt attention, their desire to learn grows. This becomes motivation and whets their desire to 'learn' in the right sense of the word. **An active teacher leads her students to see what's interesting about their subject/subjects.**

As mentioned in the above paragraph, a well-prepared lesson aids a teacher's happiness. Preparedness, a thorough knowledge of the syllabus and the materials therein, is what qualifies an active teacher.

I would say, even if a teacher has been teaching the same matter for quite some time, she must 'revise' her lesson and keep her notes and teaching aids ready, before taking her class. Revising sometimes makes us gather some new angle in our teaching, a new interpretation, a new strategy to make the student learning effective. Active teaching promotes active learning.

Clarity in teaching and explaining is imperative, bringing the standard of teaching to a level every student should understand. **Active teachers take effort to plan and explain complicated ideas in a simple way.** When making their lesson plans, they remember that their students have hardly any prior knowledge of the basics and hence attempt to help students comprehend the lesson, assimilate, understand and gain confidence to be able to analyse and apply what they have learnt.

Success is sure when whatever we do is well organised and this applies to the teaching fraternity also. Breakup of the syllabus, keeping timelines to complete a topic/lesson, scheduling lessons month-wise and then breaking this down to a daily lesson is what an organised active teacher will do. Keeping timelines may not be easy and this is where the concerned teacher will choose the most important concepts, ensure that they have been incorporated properly and train the pupils to be able to think on their own. Let it not be a natural conclusion that the less important concepts/lessons need not be taught. They have to be touched upon with detail enough for a student to answer a question in that.

Learning is a continuous journey both for the tutor and the taught. **An active teacher will make that extra effort to grow in the teaching profession by upgrading her knowledge, keeping abreast with the latest teaching techniques, trying various methods, sources and avenues to grow in her profession,** which, you will agree will benefit her students.

To take you back to my opening paragraph; just because the ‘eyes’ are heard and the nods seen, it does not mean that learning has happened. That can happen, not by just transferring knowledge, but by stimulating the class to actively participate, ask questions, discuss openly, encourage their interpretations (which may be corrected if wrong), and make them feel a part of the class and develop love for the subject. Let them take home something more than the homework given, something that makes them put on their thinking caps.

“The future of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically...” is what Martin Luther King Jr. believed and this I think is what an active teacher does. ■

Benefits of Eating Walnuts

■ **Dr. Vivek Baliga**
Cardiologist and Consultant Physician

Dr. Vivek Baliga B. is a consultant physician and cardiologist, and director of Baliga Diagnostics in Bengaluru. He is a keen advocate of patient education and loves to blog about all things health-related. Learn more about him at drvivekbaliga.com.



I love walnuts. When it comes to healthy foods, I believe they are close to the top of the list. 100g of walnuts contain 15.2g protein, 65.2g fat and 6.7g dietary fiber. Walnuts contain a lot of polyunsaturated fatty acids (47.2g), particularly – linolenic acid (9.1g) and linoleic acid (38.1g), whereas other nuts are heavy in



monounsaturated fatty acids. In fact, walnuts are a whole food that has the greatest concentration of Alpha-Linolenic Acid of all edible plants.

Because of their pronounced furrows, walnuts have been dubbed ‘brain food’.

The ironic part is that studies have shown regular walnut consumption does indeed enhance brain function! Walnuts are incredibly rich in nutrients and simple to incorporate into a diet. Because they contain a lot of polyunsaturated fat, vitamins, and minerals like potassium, iron, zinc, and magnesium, they are better than the majority of other nuts, including almonds. Not just that; walnuts are superior to all other dry fruits in every way because they are high in fiber and antioxidants.

Here are a few health benefits of consuming walnuts on a daily basis.

1. Walnuts Protect Your Heart

Alpha-linolenic acid and linolenic acid, two monounsaturated fatty acids that are heart-healthy, are abundant in walnuts. Levels of bad cholesterol are reduced, while those of good cholesterol are raised. In one study, regular walnut consumption lowered the bad LDL cholesterol level by 9 – 16%. Regular walnut consumption may aid in lowering high blood pressure as well. A study noted that participants in the walnut group experienced fewer medication dose increases during the study and had better overall blood pressure control than controls. Consuming walnuts lowers systolic blood pressure in senior people, especially in those with moderate hypertension.

2. Walnuts Fight Cancer

Your risk of developing cancer can be reduced by eating walnuts. This is because they contain a lot of antioxidants and Omega-3 fatty acids, both of which have been shown to prevent cancer. Walnuts are particularly helpful for pancreatic, breast, and prostate cancer.

3. Walnuts Promote Healthy Body Composition

Walnuts are a good source of fiber, which helps you feel full for a long time after eating a few. A 100-gram serving contains around 7gm of quality fiber. They aid in the healthy loss of weight and are extremely protein-rich.

4. Walnuts Are Great For Diabetes

Consuming walnuts can lower your risk of type 2 diabetes. Studies show that eating around 30 grams per day or higher can help prevent and control type 2 diabetes. So, if you have diabetes or are looking to prevent it, make sure you reap this walnut's health benefit through your diet.

5. Walnuts Power Your Brain

Numerous studies have demonstrated the advantages of walnuts for brain function. For instance, the minerals in the nut may help to prevent inflammation and oxidative stress in the brain.

In a study conducted in Spain, the cognitive function of healthy adult subjects on a Mediterranean diet supplemented with 30g mixed nuts/day (15g walnuts, 7.5g hazelnuts and 7.5g almonds) was better than in the control group on a low-fat diet. Memory was significantly improved when compared to baseline scores in that group.



In addition to the above, walnuts are believed to help improve skin health and boost immunity. However, its effects on inflammation (which is the core reason for most health problems) are limited and have recently been disproven.

It is evident from the above that regular walnut consumption has a number of health benefits. Make sure you include them in your daily snack! ■

Pros and Cons of Buying A Property

■ Aarti Tibrewala Darooka

A chartered accountant and MBA, Aarti is an entrepreneur and financial literacy advocate. She has over 15 years of combined experience in consulting, advisory and travel industries. A national ranker in CA, Aarti is a published author, who has written a plethora of books for children's financial education and is currently helping build awareness for financial literacy



Rita is a teacher and has been teaching since she graduated. She works for reputed school in Bangalore and lives with her husband and in-laws. They have an ancestral home that is large enough to take care of their needs, even after Rita and her husband have children. Since Rita's income is significant and she has been saving consistently, she now has a good amount of money saved up. Her parents and in-laws feel that since the amount is quite big, she should invest it in a property while her husband feels that buying a property may lead to a lot of hassles. Let's take a look at the factors, both for and against buying a property, in Rita's case.

Rita already has a significant amount of money going into SIPs since her expenses were not very high from day one. The rest has been put into some stocks and FDs. Her investments would help her make the downpayment for a small 2-bedroom home in the suburbs of Bangalore. This means that making the downpayment is not an issue and would not rock her monthly cashflows. Further, since her disposable income is consistent due to a fixed salary, there is no uncertainty with respect to payment of EMIs.

Now, by taking a home loan to buy an extra house, Rita will also end up paying a good amount of interest on the home loan. Since she would be giving the house on rent, she will also get income from the house. The Income Tax Act allows her to take the benefit of the interest expense and reduce that from the rent she earns from her house. This means that since she is already earning income through salary, she will not need to pay too much income tax on her rental income as the interest will be considered an expense incurred for buying the house. For example, if she is getting ₹300,000 as total rent during the year and is paying interest of ₹360,000, since the amount of interest is higher than the rental income, there will be no tax payable on it.

“The only bad time to buy property is LATER!”
- Steve Bolton

Further, **when the interest amount is more than the interest income, and there is a loss from the house property, this loss can be set-off against the salary income** also. This will help him to reduce the tax payable on Rita’s income. So, she can choose to take a lower tenure for the loan, pay more interest upfront and reduce her immediate tax liability.

In fact, while making the decision on the amount of the loan and period for which she is taking the loan, Rita also wants to make due consideration for any maternity break she may take in a few years’ time. So, she wants to take a loan for a shorter duration and ensures she can pay off all or most of it before she takes a gap in her career.

Rita’s husband feels that buying a house will be more of a hassle. They will need to look for tenants and deal with brokers to ensure that the house does not lie vacant. Further, when you buy an apartment in a building, there is maintenance which needs to be paid monthly. Another expense related to the house would be property tax. All this put together would mean a lower return on investment.

As per Rita's elders, while buying a house may mean a lower return on investment in the short term, it would give diversity to Rita's portfolio which so far is very heavy in market-related instruments. Also, they feel that a house is a tangible asset which can be used in case of any emergency or eventuality, unlike paper investments which are only valuable under certain circumstances.

Rita's father also does not agree that the hassle of finding a tenant is a deterrent for buying the house. Most rental agreements are for a minimum of 1 year and if the agreement is for a longer period, then there is automatically no hassle for that much longer. Further, there are many websites that help you rent out the house as per your need.

Another way of making money using the house is through online websites like AirBnB, which lets you rent your fully-furnished house out for a shorter duration at a higher rate.

Rita has a lot of facts to consider before making her decision. Perhaps, if you are in a similar situation to Rita's or have had doubts while trying to buy a property, you can also consider these points before arriving at your final decision! But do remember what British entrepreneur Steve Bolton says, "The only bad time to buy property is LATER!" ■



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The Power of 'Nein' (No)

■ Meenakshi R. Ganesh

*Counsellor and wellness facilitator,
Sri Kumarans Children's Home, Mallasandra*



Meenakshi's journey in the field of mental health started when she began working on herself first and began understanding the importance of self work in her professional career choice. She also believes that it's of prime importance while entering a world of working with emotions.

She is inspired to work with children of different age groups, and believes that compassion, humour and acceptance are the driving forces of healing and change.

It was on a day when my dear student went on to win many medals and was being cheered for his interest and involvement with nature. Little did I know later that day, I would have him in my counselling space to discuss many things about his other aspects of life.

As a counsellor/facilitator, I'm blessed to meet children from all walks of life with their own troubles and journeys that they would share about and seek support and guidance with. Every once in a while, a student with a burst of creative energy and high resistance to authority walks into our professional lives and changes the way we question teaching methodologies and support strategies.

It was on that afternoon my journey with this extremely loving child began. He was quick in saying 'NO' to most things adults would suggest

and guide him with. I recall thinking out loud along with my coordinator that all that this child needs is patience from all the adults around him. It is vital for the educators to be in sync while interacting with children who are having a hard time. The teachers were on board with learning kinder ways to respond to classroom conflicts and win his trust.

As most educators, we know that without establishing trust there would be very little learning. Every time he said 'NO', we would give him another chance, another chance and another, because while children forgive easily, most adults forget the power of letting go.

His 'NO's' and 'Nein' were indicators for every adult to come up with new ways of getting him to finish his work. 'NO's' are powerful in a way of making us realise that if there are a 100 ways to resolve a conflict, there's a 101 and a 102 that we need to start thinking of and putting into action. And to be able to problem solve and work on resolving day to day behavioural nuances, I find it extremely important to have a mindset of never giving up on working with the child. Working with the child involves having difficult conversations with your fellow colleagues, disagreeing, agreeing and reaching a middle ground with the child being the focus always.



I say this because each one of us is a role model for children the minute we step into the school. I'm learning and I continue to learn everyday with small changes and conscious effort. We refer to school as a second home. What does home feel like? What makes a home comforting? These questions are vital to add to our interactions with children, because some children are seeking for that home when they enter school.

I've had the experience of witnessing a breakthrough moment with this child, and it is the most precious moment that I will cherish throughout my professional career. I've had heart warming, touching, happy and tearful moments with children, some stand out more than the others simply because it surprises you with the capabilities and endless possibilities right when you've felt like you've reached a dead end.

Eight months from that afternoon, I saw him seated outside of class cutting paper for making decorations. He looked at me and said NEIN! We had a conversation about Nein and then laughed a little, as he stood up he was ready to hear me out and I was firm, we had established respect and the nein became 'JA'.

There is no one method to work with children, what works in one moment may fail in the next attempt. Learning on the job never stops. Children look for responses and not reactions. Reactions often stem from a personal and a subjective standpoint, to which children get confused and often defy.

Educators in the classroom began rethinking different ways of engaging with this child and getting him to develop interest. Suggestions and ideas were put forth to make learning more inclusive. Mainstream education is restrictive, although I also believe that it forces educators to think quick on their feet when faced with any sort of challenges in the classroom.

Educators new in the field have so much to offer in terms of ideas and methodologies. When the experienced and the freshers come together with an open and a growth mindset, children flourish and change in ways that one could not have foreseen. I write this with my own journey of having interacted and working with very experienced and senior mentors as I entered my career path in 2017.

The next time you hear a child saying 'NO' or being defiant; it's your time to grow along with the child. ■

Teaching: Threat or Catalyst?

■ Manjula Veeranna

Founder & CEO,
International Institute For Cognitive and Learning Sciences®

Manjula Veeranna is a former classroom teacher, Principal, Neural Educator, and Learning Scientist who has spent the last two decades empowering teachers and students with scientific knowledge and human values. With a multidisciplinary background that includes post-graduation in Arts, Science and Education, as well as certifications in Educational Psychology from YALE University and Neural Education, USA, Manjula is the Founder & CEO of the International Institute For Cognitive and Learning Sciences®. She is an expert in skill-based knowledge innately related to children, parents and teachers.



As a teacher, I have always been fascinated by the debate surrounding the impact of teaching on society. Some argue that teaching is a threat to personal freedom, creativity, and independent thinking, while others believe it is a catalyst for cognitive development, growth mindset, and social progress. So, I decided to explore both sides of the argument and see whether teaching is a threat or catalyst.

From my understanding, the behaviorist school of thought sees teaching as a stimulus-response system, where the teacher provides information, and the student responds with learned behaviors. This view suggests that teaching is essential for learning. Without teaching, students would not learn necessary information or skills to function in society. This made sense to me as a teacher. After all, isn't it my job to provide necessary knowledge and skills to my students? Here I would like to

quote the words of John Watson, "Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in, and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select - doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors."

The quote by John Watson is rooted in Pavlovian classical conditioning and presages Skinner's operant conditioning and suggests that nurture can override nature. He argues that given a specific environment and training, he can shape any individual to become whatever he wants them to be, regardless of their natural talents, tendencies and race. While this idea may seem compelling, it is also controversial. Some may argue that genetics and other inherent factors play a significant role in shaping a person's abilities and traits.

I learned about the constructivist school of thought, which argues that **learning is a complex process that involves the active construction of knowledge by the learner**. In this view, teaching is not about transferring knowledge from the teacher to the student but rather facilitating the learner's construction of knowledge. This made me question my teaching style. Was I too focused on imparting knowledge and not enough on facilitating active exploration and discovery? Here, I would like to quote Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson, "Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorising prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves."

Chickering and Gamson highlight the meaning of teaching by emphasising that learning is not a passive activity, but rather an active process that requires engagement, reflection and application. They further argue that students cannot simply sit in a classroom and absorb information from a teacher. Instead, they must be actively involved in

the learning process by talking about what they are learning, writing about it, and relating it to their past experiences. By doing so, they can make connections between new information and their existing knowledge, which helps them to understand and remember the material better. Furthermore, the authors suggest that students must apply what they have learned to their daily lives in order to make it meaningful and relevant. **By making what they learn a part of themselves, students can develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the material, and use it to solve problems and make decisions in their lives.**

The cognitive school of thought focuses on mental processes such as attention, memory, and problem-solving. I realised that as a teacher, I need to be aware of the cognitive capacity of my students. Too much teaching can overload the learner's working memory, making it difficult for them to process and retain new information. I needed to ensure that my teaching was balanced and considerate of my student's cognitive capacity.



“The capacity of the human mind for formulating and solving complex problems is very small compared with the size of the problems whose solution is required for objectively rational behavior in the real world—or even for a reasonable approximation to such objective rationality.” - Herbert A. Simon.

Herbert A. Simon, a Nobel Prize-winning economist and cognitive psychologist, was referring to the limitations of human cognition in his statement. He suggests that while humans possess the capability to solve problems, the complexity of these problems in the real world exceeds our cognitive abilities. The human mind can only handle a limited amount of information at any given time, and complex problems require processing of large amounts of data, which can overwhelm our cognitive abilities. ■

We Recommend - Flippity

Flippity is a web-based platform and resource that helps create learning activities like flashcards, presentations and more to engage students. It can easily turn a Google spreadsheet into flashcards, a spelling quiz, memory game or a word search.



Features

- Uses a selection of Google sheets that allows teachers to create activities.
- Many templates and options are available for customisation.
- Templates can be utilised to create memory card games, flashcards or board games.
- Teachers can check students' progress by using a project indicator.
- The random name picker feature can make it easier to give an equal opportunity to the students. It can also make for a fun start to a group project.
- 'Randomizer' by Flippity is a way to mix words and create random combinations of words which can be used for creative writing.
- Scavenger Hunt template can be used for gamifying subject questions.
- Google integration makes it a good tool for schools using G-suite for education.

How does it help teachers?

- Gamification of learning through tools can make for an interesting way of learning for the student.
- Teachers can utilise the platform to present to the class or assess a student's performance. The class can create their own creations as well.
- Templates allow for easy customisation and reduced time for creating content. ■

Changing Before We HAVE TO!

■ VARSHA PRASAD

Editor, TeacherTribe.world

“To improve is to change. To be perfect is to change often.” – Winston Churchill

Change is inevitable...change is dynamic. In the world we live today, things are changing at a colossal speed. What was valid yesterday will not be valid today and what is valid today, will not be valid tomorrow. In this ever-changing world, resisting and fighting change to stay in our comfort zones will only make us outdated and boring.

In the teaching field especially, teachers will have to learn, unlearn and relearn at an accelerated speed to remain relevant. With the National Education Policy underway and with other newer learning concepts falling in place, the world has left us teachers with no scope for staying dormant.

Recently, I was reading a case study of how a brand like Titan, known for making watches, evolved with time, to meet the demands in the market and to keep with the customers' requirements. The company worked a lot, introspected and brainstormed on its positives and realised that its strength lay in making high-quality watch glasses. This helped them develop their eye-wear brand. Titan did not stop there! They continued to change by using their USPs and entered the accessories business. Now, Titan has made a mark in all the fields it has ventured into. If they had just continued manufacturing watches and had enjoyed their hey



days basking in the popularity, they would have been extinct by now.

Moving back to education, had we teachers ever thought before COVID, that there would come a day where online learning and online teaching would become the new norm? Had we ever considered that a day would arrive, where we would sit at the comfort of our homes and conduct classes and examinations? Though this was unplanned and though we were unprepared for this, the developments happened for the better good. Today, we can pride ourselves on how we adapted to the changes that happened around us, managed them well and came out of the situation as better facilitators.

Why do we fear change?

Most of the times, we consider 'change' as something negative. We look at change as displacement from our comfort zones and venturing into something that is new or different. We are apprehensive to walk in unknown waters. But why is this not a comfortable place to be? It is because we fear the unknown and hesitate to take the risks.

Like in the classic tale of the turtle inside the well who considered the well to be the entire universe, we will lose out on learning new things if we do not upgrade ourselves with changing times.

How can teachers change with times?

Upgrading our knowledge and upscaling our skills can take us a long way – both professionally and personally. As teachers, here are some things we can follow to flow with the change –

Unlearning – It is very important for us to unlearn a few things to relearn and adapt to newer things.

Staying connected to the latest trends – With artificial intelligence (AI) and AI led chatbots gaining popularity, it is critical for us teachers to

know and understand how these work, and how our students are making use of them in their daily lives. This will help us understand them better and talk to the class in their language.

Using the trends in class – When we know that something is trending and the children are addicted to it, we can find ways to incorporate the same in our conversations or include them as activities. For example, concepts in physics and chemistry can be taught in class using the trending movie ‘Oppenheimer’. When teachers are seen using such instances and trends in class, the children will start paying more attention in class and will start bonding well with the teachers. This will also help teachers stay relevant and will make them ‘cool’ in front of the students.

As Leo Buscaglia quoted, “Change is the end result of all true learning”. It is important for us to make change a voluntary decision, to create a better version of ourselves. So teachers, let us be the change and stay ahead of the curve. Let us become an upgraded version of ourselves. ■

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Varsha Prasad is leading TeacherTribe.world initiative from Greycaps Knowledge Tribe, exclusively for teachers, as its Editor. She is also the Editor of TeacherTribe.world magazine. It is created by Greycaps Knowledge Tribe to celebrate the contributions of our teachers. She has played a vital role in creating many products, which ignite the curiosity of children, including the Global Awareness Program, also known as GAP in schools.