

How to empower teachers: All you need to know

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Learners need an additional set of skills to be able to interact with the world outside of school. (Reuters)

By- Bindu Hari

The profiles of 21st century learners are changing rapidly, primarily because of exposure and access to technology and media. While this increased technology accessibility has positive consequences, it also has the adverse effect of lowered attention spans and the need for immediate information and gratification. Learners need an additional set of skills to be able to interact with the world outside of school. The competencies that students need to develop include collaborative skills, creative thinking skills, critical and analytical skills, and application and meta-cognitive strategies that can help them become lifelong learners. A content-focused curriculum alone does not support the development of such skills and, therefore, we need to change our approach and structure to ensure that our students are empowered and ready for tomorrow's world.

A 21st century teacher needs to be equipped accordingly to be able to effectively educate a 21st century learner. Today's educators must be reflective practitioners and lifelong

learners who create learning opportunities and experiences rather than simply teach in a classroom. They have to act as salespeople of their respective subjects, sustaining students' interest in a subject by researching and facilitating learning. The first step in creating such teachers is endowing them with pedagogical and instructional research skills, and technical know-how and knowledge to be able to support our learners. Teachers cannot just keep using age-old methods and must evolve with the times, and so must teacher-training.

Today, there are insufficient high-quality pre-service and in-service professional development training programmes for teachers and school leaders. Such programmes are essential for keeping teachers and leaders updated in all areas of child development, with aspects like pedagogy and assessment, and also with findings to raise their social, emotional and physical well-being. Soft skill development is crucial for teachers as this helps them with classroom and behaviour management, and communication, gaining a deeper understanding of student needs. These soft skills go a long way in helping teachers be better at every aspect of their job and ultimately help students learn better.

There are a range of degrees, diplomas and certificates that offer good theoretical foundation. But such courses rarely link theory to practical application in a classroom, leaving teachers half-prepared for classroom reality. An ideal teacher training course is the one that incorporates educational research and best practices from around the world and India. A good course also provides guidance on how to contextualise learning from the course and puts it into practice in a classroom. The structure of these programmes should be a 60:40 balance of theory and practice, and should offer trainee teachers the opportunity to observe good practitioners. Additionally, such courses need to inculcate critical and reflective thinking skills in teachers so that they continuously grow as educators and learners.

Educational research has evolved and we have access to best practices in pedagogy and assessments from India and the world. Teacher training courses in India should take advantage of this increased access and incorporate these insights. Teachers should learn to examine winning pedagogical approaches from around the world and then innovate best teaching practices through insightful course content. Teachers also have to be constantly engaged in the project of learning, self-reflection and bettering themselves.

The greatest resource in the classroom is a teacher. Institutions need to invest in scaling up the knowledge and skills of their teachers to empower them to help their students make meaning of their learning. Teacher-training is an oft-neglected aspect of education that is a crucial step in ensuring that our children receive high-quality holistic education that is relevant for today's world. To stay connected with our students, we, as teachers, need to keep ourselves updated. Learning must never cease.

The author is director of TISB, NAFL and NPS Group of Schools. Views are personal