

# Innovative Approaches and Strategies for Teaching: Dealing with Constraints for better Learning

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**Abstract:** A considerable amount of research done on teaching and learning is as a guide to effective teaching and better learning. There is an extensive body of research and evidence available on how ways of teaching methods and the design of curriculum affects learning. But they will be helpful only if the teacher educators apply these theories in classroom effectively, in order to observe and reflect better results enhancing reflective, autonomous and in depth learning so that the classroom gets converted into a laboratory where the teacher will relate the theory to practice leading to effective learning. The present paper throws light on some innovative approaches towards teaching providing a base for better foundation of learning and lays emphasis on how teaching in an effective manner can be encouraged and led, despite existing formidable barriers to upcoming change, as barriers are a part of any process and crossing these barriers with proper insight and skill will give direction to a way leading to better learning and a lightened future.

**Keywords:** innovative approaches, effective teaching, better learning, formidable barriers, insight and skill, lightened future

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The act of teaching, of course has no meaning without act of effective learning as a product. In education, there is a lot of support for the idea that every student is important and is the core focus of every teaching and learning process. Yet, in practice, the systems are set up to favour and support only a few individuals at the expense of the many. To overcome this, strategies supporting teaching for all and new innovations should be used and encouraged. But these new innovations should be based on some evidences so that all the pros and cons

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of the strategies are clear and they are used effectively. Also, it is accepted by many of the educational developers that good and proper teaching – meaning *teaching for an effective learning* – has to be based on strong empirical evidences about the various forms of teaching methods, different ways and approaches that produce particular learning outcomes with proper essence of development. Another crucial aspect of teaching is that it takes place in a setting which has its own unique nature, features opportunities and barriers. So, teaching should be designed keeping all the conditions and evidences into consideration for a strong foundation. In fact, there is a need to bypass the existing system from not just making a set of specific strategies happen but focusing on the roadblocks which are preventing some specific strategies from being properly implemented. Identifying these roadblocks and finding ways to remove them is the need of the hour. Also shifting the focus from the factors that promotes only cognitive development among students or simply acquisition of information or knowledge that is generally measured by usual traditional examinations and tests, to the development of more active skills, ability of problem-solving, critical thinking, and what the researchers have termed “deep” learning or “learning in depth” is the key to learning in a better way. Thus, we might best organise teaching to promote independent and deep learning which can be done when teachers take over the responsibility of encouraging learner-centered environments and orientations, encouraging more and more active learning and interaction with students, to promote deeper learning than holding only subject-centered values (Kember & Gow, 1994). Today, meaningful and useful education is something all students require to compete in the presently existing world, despite of the choice of vocation they will make eventually. Thus, a classroom is to become a place where diverse talents are recognized, nurtured leading to growth and development, where every student is made to feel a special being and is given an opportunity to realize his or her full potential, ability and is able to succeed in his or her own terms.

## **2. FOCUS TOWARDS CHANGE**

Focus towards change will lead to knowing the constraints or barriers in change and will give a start to find solutions to them helping in the development of the education process as a whole. For change we need to be aware of the pressures which are being faced for maintaining the quality of the teaching and learning process and providing the way to progress. These pressures for change in the ways of imparting education are building at a fast pace with the fast moving life. Some of the pressures are as follows:

- Fulfillment of demands by parents is a very important pressure which needs to be handled as fast as possible, as the satisfaction from the side

of parents is very essential .Their wish to see education work for all children in an equivalent manner is the main crux of successful teaching and learning process. Education is a right of all, so it should be available for all kinds of children benefitting them in one or the other way to prepare a lightened future as every child has his/her own individuality to be served in a different and individual manner using strategies that fit in according to their nature .

- The increased push for accountability from officials -the stakeholders of education i.e. what is their motive behind the education policies being framed. Are the motives according to the present day need or they are carried as it is from the past.Thus the policies are not made in a minute,they need to be analysed and it is the responsibility of the policy framers that the policies framed should fulfill the needs and aspirations of the society and the nation at large by maintaining the desired standards.For this, new thinking according to the present era and the future as well is required.
- The information , technology and communication revolution is another increasing pressure.New research and greater understanding in a better manner of the way we learn as an individual is leading to the need to bring a change according to the changing environment. According to the changing times the change is necessary for survival.To compete in the world and be active participants ,the pressure is necessary to be handled for which the learning of the future of the country should be accurate and appropriate,which can be done only by employing new approaches for teaching .
- Change in employment patterns in the global economy, which is one of the biggest and important pressure to be dealt with. Now-a-days getting employed is not easy as the changing times are demanding more and more competitive ,creative, skilled individuals with a new thinking who are expected to take the nation to new horizons .Therefore, dealing with the pressures in getting employment is must ,which can be done only by increasing the standards of education as every job demands a person who is differently skilled according to the needs of the job and can lead to a progressive thought by inculcating new innovations,which can only be done by shifting the focus from theory to practice leading the individual to discover and overcome the barriers in his/her unique way.

Thus, to deal with the above pressures ,good and effective teaching is required which involves change in teaching methods, i.e. in organisation of curricula leading to change in learning outcomes etc. which is the need of all times for new ideas to grow and flourish.Some of the essential focus points for change to

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bring new innovations, as effective teaching and good practice does not happen in a moment and accidentally are:

- Change requires leadership. Leadership of teaching may not be always from the head or the leading official of the unit or institution, though support from the head of the concerned unit is usually crucial. So, 'a teacher' is the one to owe the responsibility. There is no single model for carrying out an effective teaching practice, infact it can be developed,enhanced and distributed in many different ways, both formal and informal as the main target is change.
- Time to time discussions and seminars to critically analyze the changed practice involving extensive consultation, open and frequent communication with stakeholders, including the faculty members and non-academic staff, employers, students etc. is a major step to inculcate change in regular practice and to obtain clear vision and effective decision making.
- For a change in teaching and good practice to take the hold, there must be a recognition and of teaching efforts and successes, both within and usually beyond, as recognition leads to encouragement.
- To bring the changed practice and sustain it, there must be enough and proper support, including adequate provision of time and resources i.e. space, money etc.,which should be taken into concern by the administrators as 'Education' is the future of a nation.
- Evidence-based teaching leads to good teaching practice and a change for the better. This implies teaching approaches that are consistent with the literature in research on effective and meaningful practice are the base for new changes to impart learning.It will help us to think in a better and planned way.
- Careful advance planning and constant vigilance is required for sustaining innovation and good teaching practice. Innovation without care cannot sustain as seen in usual life also,for sustaining anything a good care is required with a pre-planning so that if obstacles arise there solutions are already prepared.

The above focus points are of concern and need to be thought to be worked upon. As,these focus points will form a lightened path for change and new revolutions.

### **3. BASE FOR INNOVATIVE TEACHING**

For the base of better learning through innovative teaching, the following steps are needed to be inculcated:

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- Teaching should be informed and evidence-based and teaching activities, achievements should be noted and preserved. If proper evidences will be available of using a particular teaching technique, then it can act as a base for more new innovations as ideas can be taken from them and they can be improved for future efficient learning according to the existing need of the teaching learning process.
- Teaching approaches should in general be helpful to all and easily understandable with less complexity, as innovations are possible only if the approaches are clear as a building can be established properly and for long term use only on a strong foundation. The more the complexity the more confusion will prevail and everything will take place in the dark with no light and no direction which may lead to the target of efficient teaching and good learning, so understanding in depth is a necessary part for making the base for innovative teaching.
- Teaching should have some conceptual reasons in the sense that why we do, how we do, what we do as teachers, as without such underpinnings an aimless teaching is done which will impart a meaningless learning. Innovations can take place only if the teachers understand the reasons behind using various strategies, their importance in a student's life, how it can be implemented, on what type of students the strategy will prove successful, with what idea the strategy is used etc., as, then only a base for innovative teaching can be built in the true essence leading to new changed teaching and learning process helping in the development of the desired change.
- Assessment of process and outcomes should be involved in teaching, so that teaching approaches can be assessed on their utility and effectiveness, in particular for promoting particular types of learning in particular environments having different constraints. Assessment helps in realizing the mistakes, shortcomings in the process and gives an opportunity to improve upon them and developing a strong foundation on which a strong building new innovative and creative ideas can be laid.
- Teaching should reflect the use of change and improvement and should provide basis for building or creating new ideas. As, without knowing the need for change, change is not possible. The real motivator for change is the knowledge of the importance of improvement and reflection of the picture of the new changed world and its merits, and if motivation is appropriate change will definitely take place bringing new thoughts and lead to new horizons, making a strong base for the upcoming progress .

#### 4. BARRIER IN EFFECTIVE TEACHING

A major challenge is to deal with constraints effectively and organise teaching so as maximize learning effectiveness. A major barrier to change is the lack of training for the teaching role and ignorance of the research literature on effective pedagogy. Lots and lots of ideas are introduced for betterment but are not implemented properly as teachers are not aware and confident enough to take the responsibility of a change for the better due to which traditional methods are again more into practice, inspite of so many new approaches to impart effective learning. For this, teachers should be equipped in a proper way with latest techniques and should know that in what conditions the strategy or technique is needed. For equipping them, a sequential training arranged in steps should be imparted as there is a need to modify the existing pattern of training of teachers.

- First step should be the theoretical learning and understanding of concepts related to the subject matter as sometimes the school times are not helpful in bringing clarity to a concept due to certain reasons which are understood and gained at a later stage. Infact filling the gaps left is necessary as despite of so many efforts also the gaps are a part, So, in the nutshell, first of all teacher should be a subject expert, because if he/she is a subject expert then only he/she can think of innovations and be justified.
- Second step is making him/her aware of the various teaching and learning theories given by great educationists from time to time, so that he/she brings a strong base for teaching effectively. This step should also include certain tasks for the teacher as a follow up of the learnings imparted and gained by them, such as asking them to think of a situation from their life experiences where the learned theory is helpful and apply it. These tasks can be given as an assignment which will be evaluated.
- Third step is making the teacher aware of the various methodologies in teaching and putting him into such situations where the methodologies are helpful. That is explaining him/her the why of certain methods. Actually, the working of the methods is understood but the focus should be where the methods should be used and in teaching what subject matter the methods are helpful, so that teachers are aware of the true essence of the methodologies and their importance in educational situations.
- Fourth step is allotting different samples of children to different teachers under training and asking them to apply suitable theory and technique of teaching according to the need of the sample of students. For evaluating this, experts from all over the country and outside the country should be given the responsibility of preparing effective feedbacks and taking the follow ups.

- Fifth step should involve the assignments given to the teachers for detecting the problems of their students in the classrooms allotted to them, understanding them and then find appropriate solutions to their problems. As a follow up and evaluation of the teachers, the experts should check whether the problems of students are solved to an extent or not.
- Sixth step is organizing planned training according to the needs of the individual teachers inculcating proper and adequate measures for improvement in a particular manner. Training should be given for teaching a group of students but with individual approach considering every child a concern. Values, responsibilities and the qualities of a teacher should be made aware of.
- Seventh step is again leaving the teachers in the field and checking out their areas of quality and putting them in a course of specialization of his/her interest and using his/her efficiency to the best.
- Finally, examinations and practicals leading to results in which properly the specialization and the best part of the teacher needs to be mentioned so that he/she may be employed according to their efficiency and quality.

Thus, using the above measures the main obstacle can be thought of being removed as the above mentioned barrier is the core of the obstacles arising.

## **5. INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES FOR BETTER TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Some of the strategies evolved through innovations, which may lead to better learning and give a new direction to teaching are discussed below :

- Personalization of learning experiences is an important strategy for the new and effective model for the new education system. It includes not only 'what' of learning but also pinpoints 'how' of learning for each student. It will personalize learning experiences of each child as an individual. Personalized learning is also compatible with the Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences which identifies eight different types of intelligences whose development is very much essential for growth. It refers to personal attention to each student and nurturing him as an individual with care leading to a responsible citizen, not only sharp by mind but also creative to deal different kind of situations.
- Multi age groupings are the need of the present education system. As, children of single age group are taught together, the learning is not appropriate. For proper learning, pupils of different age groups must be taught together so that they share their point of views and life experiences

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individually ,in the light of which real learning will take place. Since in real life,a person does not deal with just his/her age groups but deals with all age groups as a whole.So, for innovative changes and better learning relating to life multi age groupings will be a help.

- Small groupings of students is another important step to better teaching and better learning, so that proper attention is paid to all the students equally and each student is treated as special .Life experience of every student is shared individually and solutions to their problems can be found easily. While the small learning communities reduce the obstacles associated with the large institutional settings,an organizational structure called advisory helps in keeping the core group all together for long times. Advisories team up minimum 15 students with a mentor. Students thus develop a good relationship with his/her peers and the caring and concerned adults.
- Cooperative learning strategy is another important strategy for better learning.It is a method of instruction in which students work in small groups for the development of the learning material and then presenting the developed work to other small groups. Doing this, they owe the responsibility not only for their own learning as well as for other's learning. In this type of learning the students act as both the motivators and the motivated.
- Project based learning is another important strategy as it connects the theory with the solutions to the real world problems. Children become independent in thinking and solving their problems.Learning in depth and holistic development of the understanding of the concepts is an important feature of this strategy.
- If the students act as the mentors ,infact the teachers then the learning will take place at a faster pace,as they will understand the problems of their class in a better way leading to better solutions.The students acting as mentors will understand the point of view of teachers and it will enrich the learning environment as they will be able to convey this in a more comprehensive way.
- Another technique given by Eric Mazur can be used which is one of the peer instruction technique. According to it the teacher poses a question to the students and the students work on it for some minutes and then a discussion takes place for the solution of the question.This is a technique which bring greater confidence among the students for their responses.
- If the teacher has appropriate knowledge about the subject matter then year after year the same teacher should teach his students as the teacher will have a good understanding about his/her students.Not only this he/



she will have a good rapport with his/her pupils and will be able to find solutions to their problems in a better way. Also, learning will also take place in a fast manner involving the students in a proper way.

- Involvement of parents is a must feature. This will not only help the child to learn more comprehensively but will also develop a feeling of real understanding for the need to be active partners in the process of change. For this, within a week a class should be kept involving parents and teachers guidance to the children.
- Regular seminars should be arranged for teaching the students, the skills of handling and resolving conflicts disturbing their lives. Since, in the present scenario there is a dire need of such teachings as it is a world full of pressure and frustrations which is working as obstacles in learning in the present classrooms hindering quality and the real essence to learn. So, this is a very very important step for inculcating innovations in education, as if conflicts will be resolved, clear and deep learning will be enhanced.
- Teaching of wisdom and character education is the main need of the hour. Wisdom refers to making good decisions which not only effect the student himself but also has a positive impact on others also. It is not the same thing as I.Q but a much more comprehensive term involving sincerity, courage, honesty, compassion, integrity etc. leading to good life choices. Also, talking about teaching of character education is not valid as character making cannot be taught. But, students can be introduced to traits like honesty, respect, justice, responsibility and other values by teachers, so that atleast they are aware of the values which form a major part in one's life.
- For inculcating education in a proper way, teachers should be given adequate preparation time and proper developmental seminars should be organized according to latest research, in which teachers express their views and suggestions frankly and learn from each other's experiences leading to development in theory and make decisions regarding connecting the theory with practice, so that education including current issues and concerns, needs is imparted and traditional lectures made so many years back are not carried as such. Changing times need changed system accordingly.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING CONSTRAINTS

To overcome constraints in successful teaching, the need of change is urgent. For this, there are number of ideas on how it may be done (e.g. Biggs, 1999; Kember, 1997; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Weimer, 2002). These ideas include:

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Teaching methods that stress student activity and performance in the various tasks given, rather than just mere acquisition of information and facts should be encouraged with the opportunities provided for meaningful personal interaction between the learner and the taught and for collaborative learning in a team. For all this, more authentic and realistic methods of assessment and evaluation, that pay stress on performance in natural settings, including the appropriate elements of peer and self-assessment in the teaching and learning process, so that the learning processes are made more explicit, encouraging students to learn in a reflective manner. Tasks in learning which encourage integration of the information and knowledge along with skills from different fields should form the main part of the teaching learning process.

Therefore, teaching should include depth which includes deeper learning and understanding in connection with the existing information. Child should be made to learn in collaboration with the team and in the light of certain activities and emphasis should be on authentic methods of assessment according to the nature of the activity and the child. Concepts should be distinguished from critical information and skills should be given as much importance as knowledge. Curriculum planning should focus on realistic student learning outcomes rather than other things. Both problem-based and inquiry methods should be used as they encourage learning through activities, proper interaction with the teacher, team learning, reflective learning, authentic and valid assessment, leading to integration of knowledge from various fields. Talking about reflection, overall, teaching should be reflective. Reflective teaching is an innovative approach which allows a teacher to look at what he/she does in the classroom, thinking about why he/she does it, and thinking about whether his/her action works or not. It is in fact, a process of observing and evaluating the self by the teacher himself or herself. Collecting the information about what goes on in the classroom, and analyzing, evaluating this information, own practices and underlying beliefs are identified and explored, whether the strategies used are fruitful or not. It has a great impact on learning and may then lead to changes and improvements in our teaching. Schon (1993) suggested that practice of reflective teaching is a continuous process and involves the learner thoughtfully, considering one's own experience in applying knowledge to practice while being taught by the concerned professionals. It helps the learners to develop their personality themselves. Gibbs (1988) marked that the reflective practice suggests the development of analysis of feelings, evaluation of experience in the individuals etc. In the nutshell, this kind of teaching involves recognition, examination, rumination over the way an individual teaches and imparts

learning. As individuals possess their own experiences, background and individuality, reflective teaching helps in assessing one's ideas, bringing out certain assumptions, knowledge, beliefs, values and attitudes to teaching leading to better learning.

Hence, teaching in a proper way, keeping the above mentioned ideas and suggestions in mind, creating depth to inculcate deeper learning and further assessing it, i.e.

- Which teaching model is used?
- How does it apply in some particular teaching situations?
- How well will it work?

forms the crux of successful teaching and learning.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Teacher should act as a facilitator and as a guide along with the subject-matter expert. Along with this, a constant battle should continue to carry even those instructional innovations that have proved to be effective, i.e. student learning research for the way we teach and plan curricula should also be carried and should form a major part of imparting education in an innovative way. Such responsible initiatives can be given credit for encouraging teaching based on evidence of practice leading to effective learning. Also, the above mentioned suggestions can prove to be helpful to a large extent along with much more to do, if teaching is to be practised in a way that is as planned, organized, systematic and professional as is our approach to research. Doing all this, definitely involves more and more efforts from individual teachers, but it also requires changes in the structure that can only be brought about by the responsible leaders in academics – including structures that understand and recognize the value and importance of teaching expertise. The approaches which ensure quality and measure learning processes and outcomes in a much more planned and sophisticated manner for better learning are the need of the hour. The senior administrators should be involved with the teaching function, to familiarise themselves about effective and innovative practice in teaching, learning, along with planning involved for curriculum framing, and to respond to the questions of the community at large not just as managers but as *educators*. As a final conclusion, student learning, lies at the heart of education, and any attempts to link research/existing information and teaching more closely, using effective methods of teaching as suggested may yield effective and meaningful learning which is the ultimate and the major goal in teaching and learning.

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