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Pedagogical Strategies for Engagement of Learners: An Experiential Account

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Abstract

In the post-independence era of education to improve the quality of the overall education system various national commissions and national level reports like, University Education Commission (1948-49), Kothari Commission (1964-66), NPE (1986), and revised PoA (1992), NCF (2005), NEP (2020) recommended boosting the quality and quantity of school education system and higher education system. But the momentum was not enough to uplift the overall quality of education. The major lacuna was a lack of proper balance between practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge. Also, all the policies and commission reports were very good at the aspirational level but failed at the implementation and monitoring level. This paper attempts to suggest real-life classroom strategies for effective classroom practices for the present educational scenario. Proper implementation of the suggested strategies would increase the quality as this would be the next future of education.

Introduction

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes technological interventions, quality education, and brain-based education and thus elaborated in length on massive transformative education that is much needed in the present Indian Education System. The World Economic Forum (2020) conducted a study to understand the impact of COVID-19 on

education. The research analysis highlighted that schools shut down all across the world during pandemic times. Manifold's growth in e-learning and teaching was imparted through digital platforms. It helped to increase the retention of information in less time. In reality, we have adopted online learning, with no proper training, insufficient bandwidth, and with minimum preparation. This also resulted in a rise in dropouts, learning losses, and an increase in the digital divide. COVID 19 raised a very basic question on the readiness of the education system whether it's teachers, management, or all other stakeholders. UNESCO (2020) reported that this pandemic is going to change education profoundly. And to shape the future the education commission suggested the mobilization and participation of all. It was prominently accepted that there are no ready-made solutions, and collective efforts coming from teachers, students, and the community. It was also learned that innovation and creativity are broadly distributed in the community. But why has this situation arrived? Why are we helpless? The present education that we are imparting is not real education. How do we nourish the education with the latest pedagogies and content that make it ever-ready? How best can we predict the future of education? We need to change the whole education ecosystem to have realistic and futuristic education. This background paved the base for pedagogical strategies for the engagement of learners.

The Context

In the present context, we are deprived of technological advancement, a futuristic perspective on education, and a research-based system of education. This will require a more standardized way of pedagogical methodology as well as flexibility in teaching as per learners' capacity. Education is the backbone of any nation. And its quality and quantity ensure the overall health of any nation. It is also an indicator of the quality of life. Therefore, the need of today is to provide sustainable education.

In the early definition of student engagement, if a student's eyes were directed toward the academic content in the book or on the board, the student was believed to be paying attention and engaged with the learning content (Bender, 1985). More elaborative and comprehensive definition could be cognitive engagement, active participation with, and emotional commitment to learning particular content of learners (Zepke & Leach, 2010). But how to ensure student engagement learning is active. Educational traditions have an influence on teachers. And in the process, many self-perceptions and experiences have been proclaimed by the teachers. In the Indian classroom where number of learners ranges from 20 to 70 in each class approx. the teaching-learning process becomes more stressful and

increases anxiety. And when adequate educational materials, related equipment, or resources are not available it becomes more burdensome. In this case, all the below mentioned strategies are effective ways to increase student engagement, but they are purely teaching tips based on faculty experience and suggestions on how to teach a concept. You have to read it, understand it, and internalize it based on your knowledge and experience to get the maximum out of it.

Process of Learner's Engagement through Learner Autonomy

The probable answer to the above proposed ideas can be addressed to some extent if we are able to engage the learners within the content. The concept of 'Learner Engagement' discusses the idea of learners actively immersed with the content that they are involved with. To chalk down the idea in its present context, we discuss the concept of clarity that we can bring into the content so that we can create instruction that embarks upon interests of the students as well as engages students intellectually. This interest and engagement can be created when the autonomy is given to the students (Reeve et al., 2004). Autonomy to the learner shall demand the teacher to ask the learners, what do they want to know from the course or subject? How do they want to know or understand the course/subject? Why should they know about what they are trying to know about the content?

Also, the key principle to keep into consideration is to know your students: To know the learners, the teacher needs to ask these metacognitive questions to herself:

- Do my students like the complexities of the content or do they like the simplicity of the topic?
- Do they like real life examples of the teacher or do they like examples of the concept?
- Alternatively, a digital document can be created to record these Facts-What are the expectations of the students from the course and how do they want to meet these expectations from the course?

The above information will set a ground to derive a basic idea of why are the learners enrolled into your course or why are they sitting in your class.

Basic Considerations for a Teacher

Fostering Intellectual Engagement is the core responsibility of a teacher for effective teaching learning cycle (Lowyck, 1994, as cited in Fareed, 2018). We have intellectual engagement in the teaching-learning following the basic considerations for a teacher, as the teacher fraternity is considered to be intellectually engaged in the teaching-learning process. It is

presented with below mentioned diagram and elaborated.

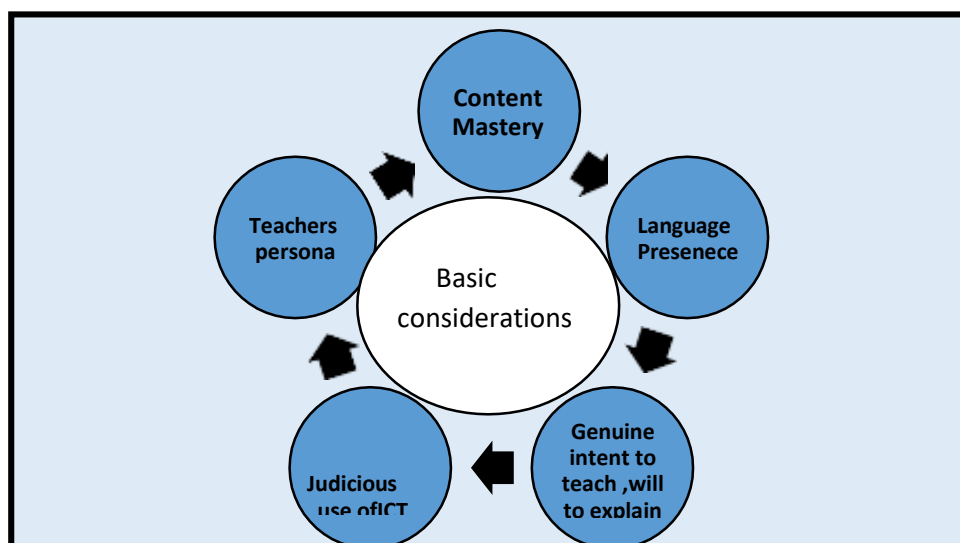


Diagram 1: Teachers Basic Considerations

1. **Being a Content Master:** The recognition of an effective teacher is based upon extensive subject knowledge that she possesses (OECD, NA, Fareeda, 2018). The teacher has to continuously read and know of the content from the depth and breadth of the topic.
2. **Use of Information and Communication Technology:** The different types of technology for a teacher are important to be understood. Also, the access and updating of recent ICT tools to transaction of effective teaching is important (Bhattacharjee & Deb, 2016, Fareeda, 2018). Teachers should be equipped with presentation tools as well as assessment tools like Powerpoint Presentations, Quizzes, Testmoz etc. And use of these tools to present content in a judicious way will make the teaching learning process effective and purposeful.
3. **Language Presence:** Communicating in the language that learners would understand is imperative. English proficiency is must, but with that if the teacher is easily able to communicate in the other languages that are most relatable is important (Marlina, 2018, Fareeda, 2018). A similar suggestion was recommended in the NEP 2020 as the use of multiple languages in the classroom will increase learners' engagement and may maintain their interest in the content.
4. **Genuine intent to teach:** The student's enthusiasm sometimes depends upon teachers' genuine intention to teach that content and subject. The more she is genuine and the more she puts efforts into understanding learners and provides the content with soul, the more the students will start connecting with the teacher.

5. **Teachers Persona:** The teacher's personality is the center point of connection with the learner. Her approachability, pleasant smile, clean and effective dressing matters to the students. These are certain invisible points that matter in the class. In this context, it becomes important that teachers should possess these qualities that develop rapport with the students.

Teacher educators in their professional life and personal life have learned strategies that enhance student engagement. These strategies are usually talked in formal and informal discussions. Here, we would like to discuss step by step process that can be used to make the teaching-learning process engaging for students with appropriate examples. These steps can be addressed to create clarity in the content that faculty/teachers teach to the students for inclusive classrooms and for intellectually engaging teaching learning process. As these strategies are purely based on the real-life experience of the teacher/faculty. Teacher education can use it directly or modify it as per their requirement.

1. **Write down the Purpose:** Proving students the purpose from various perspectives helps in seeking clarity in what they do (Gawarikar & Xavier, 2021). Once the purpose is known, the engagement is naturally created. The purpose of the class is to be thought and reflected by the teacher. The purpose is from various perspectives:
 - One is the purpose with which the teacher takes that topic, content, pedagogy and the chapter;
 - The other is the purpose of the topic that is the objective of the chapter in the textbook
 - The third is the purpose with which students should understand it. Why should a student understand this topic? How will it help him/her from an outcome-based perspective? That can be the entrance exams perspective or its usefulness in future career related choices". Another way to put that up is: Why should the students understand this topic? It means its relevance from career perspective has to be cited in the class.
2. **Ensure Logicality:** Integrating logicality is not only important to see the connectedness of a concept in question but also to handle emotions (Gawarikar & Xavier, 2021). If it helps to handle emotions, let's see one way of creating it.

Take a concept and see the concentric circles associated with it. This means that a concept is taught at various levels and at various grades to the students. To make it more precise, we can understand this with the help of an example. If the concept of population is to be taught then it can begin from the unit of family, a nuclear family, a large family, society, social

problems, issues of population, poverty, education. etc. or we can say that another concentric circle is the culture of different states, its population, State that has maximum population and then the population of the nation and its rank in the entire world. So, one has to take the first step and identify the concentric circle you want the students to know to establish logicity.

This is your perspective to the content and helps to create a logical system of thought in the taught concept. This perspective to the content can be based on context and need of the learner. This is highly dependent upon the creativity and content expertise of the teacher. This concentric circle can be drawn on the board so that it makes a visual appeal so that what is taught is spoken and is also there on the board. This will add to the retention of the memory of the learner and serves the dual coding memory for a concept (Paivio, 1986).

3. **Powerful Explanation to Reduce Abstraction:**

The concept that needs to be taught must be explained but in teachers own words. Elaboration is being perceived here as to the point explanation of the concept in consideration. The meaning of Illustration is that, the concept has to be provided with some pictures, graphs, or something that is tangible in nature. This helps to look into the concept in a concrete form. The existence of the concept being cited into the class by the teacher will establish more clarity. So, if the teacher can elaborate, illustrate and exemplify it will help to attain clarity in the taught concept to the students.

Abstracts concepts have to be exemplified with related examples. For example, to understand the concept of 'Thinking' it can be explained that 'Thinking is like the deep ocean'. This also means that thinking is like an ocean. This means on the surface the ocean has waves that are stagnant in the same way the thinking is also stagnant or is superficial on the surface of it but if you go a little deep it will help explore many variables just like the sea. From the example one can see how a concept of thinking has been related with the concept of ocean that has no direct relationship with the content. As in, the concept can be given an analogy or a metaphor. If the analogy is present, then it becomes easier to compare the concept with something that is not related with the content and academics.

4. **Create Relevancy:** There is dire need to make the courses and programs relevant to the needs and contexts of learners (Harrison & Scriven 2009). Relevancy can be created with citing examples as well as showing the connectedness with future career reference of the learners.

The content can be connected with the real life of the students. The connection with real life is possible with the help of an example. This example can be something that is given from the vicinity of the students. That is if the students are from Baroda, give an example from Baroda itself. Example, If the concept of entrepreneurship is to be discussed, then there must be a discussion on examples of entrepreneurs from Baroda or from the place where learners belong to. Relevancy may also be cited by not discussing just the big successful entrepreneurs but beginning with something that is small and can be achieved. So that they can understand the concepts of entrepreneurship in real life and can think of developing and implementing on similar lines or on the bigger ideas.

While discussing this teacher can also reinforce the fact of the connectedness of the topic with future career reference or with the connectedness to future concepts into consideration that the learners may learn in later part of their life.

5. Ensure Accuracy

The teacher can quote researched facts from authentic sources and material wherever possible to create connectedness with the content imparted. For example, if the teacher takes Economics subject and content then one should research on what is present status of employment, poverty, population of that city, state, or present status inflation etc.

6. Ask Relevant Questions with the right intent

Questioning is an art and teacher must have mastery over it to use it at the right time and right place. The teacher has to ask questions when students start putting up the explanation. These questions are not asked with the intent of showing the students that I know but with the intention of knowing how much they know. This will align to the maxims of teaching that is 'known to unknown'. This will help the teacher to create the interest and engagement required in the class.

The teacher can also ask value related questions. For example, each and every course has some or the other value components associated with it. A teacher can ask content specific value related question like what would you do if you were there? What is your opinion about this? Such questions or others can be addressed in the beginning, middle or at the end of the content.

7. Address the variety of learners' expectations in the class

Any average class comprises of different kinds of learners. Naturally all these learners have different learning styles and the composition of these learning styles varies from learners to

learner. A professional teacher is equipped with tools, techniques and approach to engage learners. Therefore, teacher has to think about nature of the content and preferred pedagogy of the learner. For example, on any concept or topic apart from the teachers' content delivery, a class might ask for more discussions and less explanation. In this case, the teacher might open up her class with the concept questions. Whatever is accumulated to them in terms of the understanding can be shared by them in the class. Other than this what remains can be taken by the teacher in the form of consolidation. Thus, we can say that, teacher can change the pedagogy and support the learners as per the need of the content to be transacted and emphasize the way they want to learn.

8. Seek Depth

Whether the depth is created in the classroom and if it's required or not is another point, but the teacher must research in depth the content of the class before she addresses it. These discussions with the help of questions will help the teacher to logically connect with the past known and future unknown content. This will help to create depth in the class. Preparing concentric circles as mentioned above for seeking logicality will also help to create depth in the content.

9. Use Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive thinking helps the learner in reflecting on their own thinking process and thereby equipping them with self-awareness and accountability. One of the ways to achieve it in the classroom situation is one can revise using metacognitive strategies like, What did you learn today? and How did you learn it? These questions will help the students to connect and understand their own ways of learning so that they can become autonomous and responsible (Doulík et al., 2015, Jaleel &, Premachandran. 2016).

10. Think from the Perspective of the learner

For every teacher, intellectual empathy is important. This means the teacher should know how students think, feel and expect from her class. This enables her to understand the mental set up with which the student sits in the class and thus effectively capitalizes on academic achievement (Ercoúkun, et. al.,2014). This will also decrease the cognitive load of the learners, since the teacher is able to think from the point of view of the learner. Below is the diagram for step-by-step process for engagement of learners.

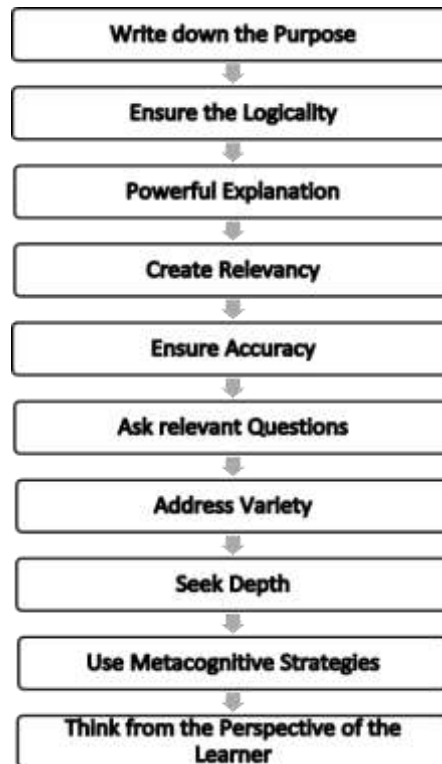


Diagram 2: Step by Step Process for Engagement of learner's

Conclusion

We need to critically reflect on the role of education in nurturing healthy societies. The steps and learner autonomy projected in the paper may aid in nurturing healthy intellectual engagement of the learners. Now the need is to build robust, flexible, futuristic content to dealwith the needs of future learners.

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