Teaching Through a Pandemic: A Mind-set for Teachers at this Moment

Mrs. G. Naga Laxmi, M.Com, MBA
Faculty, Department of Commerce,
St. Pious X Degree & PG College for Women,
Nacharam, Hyderabad.

ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic has forced most of the governments around the world to temporarily close educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of this pandemic. These nationwide closures are impacting over 89% of the world's student population. The lockdown orders of the governments has caused widespread school closures for an unknown duration impacting millions of learners worldwide. Teachers are scrambling to find ways to support students from afar through distance and online learning though feeling overwhelmed by this daunting task. Hundreds of teachers, are contemplating various concerns of pending teaching classes, teach-from-home options, online teaching pedagogies and weighing in on the mental approach they need to stay grounded in this difficult time and same time keep the student community rightly motivated. In all about discussions and conversations about teaching during the coronavirus pandemic, spilling out the concerns and anxieties of teachers: **What will we do if the educational institutions close for months? How can we shift to online learning if we're closing tomorrow, or even in a few hours? How will special education students be cared for? What about children who have no internet access? What if, in the end, the education systems decide that online learning is working just fine, and never reopen?**

The panic is all perfectly understandable.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many of the teachers around the world are traditionally tuned to direct interactive style of teaching in the classrooms under a formal setup. Chalk and board method is the most widely used technique for teaching supported by use of ICT tools to make the class a bit more interesting. The physical presence of teacher and students in the classroom where direct teaching and discussions are conducted is the most familiar scenario in the educational system. Neither the teaching fraternity nor the education system at a large imagined such crises of

lockdown hindering the entire process. A big jolt has fallen on it thereby challenging to find alternatives to combat it. As silver lining in the cloud there are plenty of teachers in the mix who had weeks of crisis experience under their belts and also many educators who had long careers in online and distance learning. There are many highly educated, experienced, effective, fantastic and highly creative teachers providing strategies as fast as the obstacles are appearing.

At the highest level, a shift in mindset would be required—even the most optimistic educators should concede to this point. There are plenty of strategies and tactics to be adopted and the crucial emotional and psychological scaffolds that need to be considered to teach in this new paradigm. In order create a sustainable and engaging distance learning experience for the students for effective implementation of digital instruction and self-paced learning the following pointers need to be considered:

1.1 SIMPLICITY IS KEY

Every teacher has her own unique style of handling her students and the course. As per the course requirements, a teachers adopts various strategies to explain the concept clearly to their students offering instructions as per the need. It usually starts with a whole group discussions and teaching, followed by an endless stream of questions from students to clarify next steps. While this process can be frustrating at times, students can always rely on each other and the teacher in the room when they're stuck. One of the challenges of distance learning is that the teacher and the students are no longer in the same room to collectively tackle misconceptions. Instead, the large bulk of learning time is inevitably going to be driven by tasks that require a high level of self-direction.

As a result, simplicity is key. It is critical to design distance learning experiences that have very clear instructions and utilize only one or two resources. It's also best, when possible, to provide resources like readings as PDF's and self created teaching videos that students can always access. Keep in mind that simple structures can still require rigorous work: Tasks with few instructions often lead to the greatest amount of higher-order thinking, as students figure out what to do within defined parameters. Distance learning should push educators to think about how they can be leaner and more concise with their delivery of new information.

1.2 ESTABLISH A DIGITAL HOME BASE

Simplicity being understood, it's important to have a digital home base for the teachers as well as students. Digital setup need to have accessibility to effective network with wifi and internet

connections. Edutech can be made possible through learning management system like Google Classrooms, or it can be a self-created class website. Also recommend are Google Sites as a simple, easy-to-set-up platform. What is needed is a single digital platform that students can always visit for the most recent and up-to-date information. It can be tempting to jump around between all the cool edtech applications out there—especially as so many of them are offering free services right now—but simplicity and familiarity are invaluable. Students need to feel comfortable going to the same place to access the same tools. The farther away the teachers are from students, the more important it is to cultivate stability and practice norms.

Additionally, if attendance was a challenge before, distance learning is going to magnify it. So students need a place to go when they fall out of the loop. Filling in gaps is only going to get harder when the teacher cannot quickly engage in individual or small group instruction. Students are going to need to take control of their own learning. Teachers' goal is to create a clear framework that allows them to do that.

1.3 PRIORITIZE LONGER, STUDENT-DRIVEN ASSIGNMENTS

Efficiency is key when designing distance learning experiences. Planning is going to take more time and require a high level of attention to detail. One will not be able to correct mistakes on the fly or suddenly pivot when kids are disengaged.

To effectively manage time and sanity, teachers will want to prioritize longer, provide student-driven assignments and tasks that buy them time to keep planning future units—and that get their students off the computer. Focus on building toward long-term projects where students have autonomy and a clear set of checkpoints and deadlines that need to be met. When possible, create opportunities for students to discuss what they're learning with their families and include an element of student choice to really build engagement.

1.4 INDIVIDUAL TOUCHPOINTS ARE GAME-CHANGERS

The things that is mostly missed is the human connection cultivated in the classroom. The interactions teachers have with their students in the corridors, before and after class or during breaks in between teaching, are irreplaceable. The verbal and non- verbal connection that vibrates and connects students and teachers disappears in a digital classroom. What students will miss the most is the human connection that is cultivated in the classroom. While it can be tempting to focus on content in the distance learning assignments and instructional videos, what matters more is creating structures for personalized touch points with one's students.

Touch points can be maintained through any medium like: emails, video messages, phone calls, messages through learning management system, comments on shared documents, etc. Creating a structure and sticking to it by a teacher may inculcate certain discipline among the students. Students will gauge the teacher's investment and know that they care about them. It's important to bear in mind that cultivating an engaging distance learning experience is hard. It takes time and an incredible amount of patience on behalf of the teacher.

2. Challenges

Adapting digital platform to connect with the students and conduct teaching is by no way smooth and easy for a teacher. Left with no choice and also perceived as one of the best alternatives during this lockdown time for engaging the students productively, a teacher has to prepare oneself to accept and adapt to the challenges. Some important factors a teacher need to understand to face such challenges are :

2.1 EXPECT TRIAL... AND PLENTY OF ERROR

Start by being reasonable with oneself. Putting too much pressure on oneself may result in total chaos in teaching. It is, in fact, impossible to shift to distance learning overnight without lots of trial and error. Expect it, plan for it, and to do ones best to make peace with it.

2.2 ACKNOWLEDGE THE EXTRAORDINARY

All are operating in the shadow of a global pandemic, and it is disorienting and limiting. Business as usual is unrealistic. The real "points to consider" are not **"the strict adherence to 'regular' conditions and norms,"** about how to structure distance learning like more typical learning experiences, **"but how to provide a rich experience to all learners who are now without 'traditional' teachers standing beside them in classes."**

So while a teacher should try to provide "meaningful activities," caution should be exercised due to limited exposure in effectively utilizing the ICT tools. It must be understood that everything cannot be tackled immediately. In other words, teachers should give themselves the time and the permission to figure this out."

2.3 REDUCE THE WORKLOAD

A teacher should plan to do less. Students won't be able to work as productively, anyway—so don't assign the work they cannot do. Consider that parents are trying to work from home, and siblings are vying for computer and Wi-Fi time. Try Google quizzes using Forms, a reading

log, some short live sessions with teachers and classmates, maybe vocabulary extension, maths and geometry problems (but not too many). Experience confirmed that time and distance play funny games during a crisis: "What would normally take one class period to teach in the classroom will probably take twice as long in online mode.

2.4 NO PERSON IS AN ISLAND

Humans are social animals. Working from home, or worse, from quarantine, is isolating and often depressing for both teachers and students. Make a concerted effort to speak to other colleagues and trusted professionals to provide emotional and psychological context to work. Teaching at this moment is extraordinarily hard, and a teacher would need the virtual company of people who are experiencing the same.

2.5 MIND THE GAP

Teachers' work will be hard, but there are students facing more severe challenges. Students with no internet or no computer will need support, as will those with learning differences or other circumstances that make distance learning especially difficult. Equity is an issue. Assessment is an issue. But the students are doing their best and giving the strength to go on. Teachers can focus on the old analog approaches: paper-and-pencil tasks, workbooks and activity packets that can be mailed home, and updating parents and students via phone calls daily.

3. Conclusion

The mission of all education systems is the same. It is to overcome the learning crisis we were already living with and respond to the pandemic we are all facing. The challenge today is to reduce as much as possible the negative impact this pandemic will have on learning and teaching and build on this experience to get back on a path of faster improvement in learning. As education systems cope with this crisis, they must also be thinking of how they can recover stronger, with a renewed sense of responsibility of all stakeholders and with a better understanding and sense of urgency of the need to close the gap in opportunities and assuring that all children have the same chances for a quality education.

REFERENCES

1. blog.innerdrive.co.uk/studies/7-the-one-about-teacher-mindset
2. www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-through-pandemic-mindset-moment
3. indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/coronavirus-lockdown-education

4. www.forbes.com/sites/johnewing/2020/04/17/teachers-in-the-pandemic
5. www.oecd.org/education/Supporting-the-continuation-of-teaching-and-learning-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic

Author:

Mrs G. Naga Laxmi, M.Com, MBA
Head, Department of Commerce,
IQAC Member,
St. Pious X Degree and PG College for Women,
Nacharam, Hyderabad.
Mobile No: 9948254680
Mail: ghatti.laxmi@hotmail.com