

EDUCATION PLUS

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Salil Sahadevan

You know that kid who stares blankly at the timetable grid while filling the school bag for another day of routine? School timetables, like the ringing of the bell, signal a rigidity that suggests time is an absolute and physical entity. But that is not how learning happens. Educational time is fluid, a subjective experience influenced by an individual's emotional states. Unlike the standardised time in a timetable, learning opens uniquely for each student, a reality that traditional timetables often fail to accommodate.

Symbol of structure

Originally, bells were introduced to manage time and ensure punctuality; a symbol of structure and efficiency in western thought. As time passed, the bell came to segment the day into periods, allowing convenient transitions from Math to Language to Biology, and finally freedom in the evening. The school bell – much like Pavlov's bell used with dogs – conditions behaviour, though with good intentions. John Taylor Gatto described this regimented approach as a prison of measured time. What if we consider the biological clocks of students and design the schedules differently?

Eastern educational traditions take a different approach to time. Instead of mechanical devices, these systems wove time with natural biorhythms. The rising sun, the movement of leaves, or an animal call guided daily schedules. An inner awareness of the individual learner and educator alike was connected to the cycles of Nature. While it sounds overly idealistic for us today, it presents an opportunity to reflect on how we can cultivate an intuitive, self-responsible, personalised learning experience that respects the natural rhythms of learners.

Our internal biological clocks – known as circadian rhythms – govern our sleep-wake cycles and energy levels. By understanding these rhythms, educators can design schedules that fit learning activities to match periods of peak alertness and engagement. Similarly, studying sleep cycles – the distinct stages we experience during the night – offers insights into memory consolidation and cognitive function. For example, adolescents display different sleep patterns and energy levels compared to younger children and adults. Education researchers can track these rhythms through self-reporting, melatonin level measurements, and observation. By adjusting

Away with the bell

Can we (re)design timetables to take into account the rhythms of students' bodies and minds?



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learning experiences to these individual rhythms, students are not merely present, but truly ready for optimal cognitive performance.

Our sense of time is not just personal; it affects how we learn too. Waiting for someone we care about can change how time feels. In the same way, looking forward to a learning project can either make us more interested or more anxious. When institutions blend subjects into themes for interdisciplinary learning, flip the class for self-learning, and design for competency-based learning, they need a flexible approach to time, timing, and timetables.

Why should schedules be personalised to reflect individual energy levels and circadian rhythms? While traditional timetables value efficiency, elevating student engagement to a primary goal is equally essential. Identify peak learning times or power hours for each student. Cluster those with similar patterns to create hi-flex timetables. Such experimentation may lead to initial chaos. In a connected world of constant learning, rigid instructional hours have become obsolete. Adaptable schedules are key to seizing the learning potential of every moment. They also come with uncertainty, scalability challenges, and difficulties in implemen-

tation. Still, they are worth piloting because the idea of habits of mind and habits of body have futuristic implications on how we teach and learn.

Learning over time

Philosophers and scientists agree that, at the quantum level, time is not necessarily continuous but granular. This supports breaking down learning into smaller, manageable chunks with opportunities for more reflection. As time is a matter of perspective, not rigid measurement, we should shift from measuring performance at specific moments to appreciating the ongoing journey of learning.

We invest heavily in time – the scarcest resource – to enable learning. Yet, how that time is used often receives less attention. Not all learning moments hold the same value; disengaged time equates to lost time. So, the ideal timetable will be characterised by hybrid models, hi-flex small group approaches, and clusters of circadian rhythms, all supported by continuous reflection and feedback. These new forms of timetables are less about time and more about minds that learn.

Views expressed are personal.

The writer is Deputy Secretary, University Grants Commission, and a Learning Designer.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Swami Vivekanand Scholarship for Academic Excellence

An initiative of the Government of Rajasthan.

Eligibility: Indian citizens residing in Rajasthan under 35 years pursuing a UG, PG, Ph.D. or postdoctoral programme who meet the specified income criteria.

Rewards: Up to ₹100,000 monthly and other benefits

Application: Online

Deadline: January 15

www.b4s.in/edge/RGAEI

Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam Young Research Fellowship 2024

An initiative of Technology, Education, Research and Rehabilitation for the Environment (TERRE) Policy Centre.

Eligibility: Indian citizens between 18 and 25 years who are pursuing/have completed a UG, PG or Ph.D. in any field related to environmental research.

Rewards: Up to ₹25,000 and a certificate

Application: Online

Deadline: February 15

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An opportunity offered by Somerville College, Oxford University, the U.K.

Eligibility: Open to Indian nationals currently residing in the country and have applied for a Master's degree in Sustainability Science and Development.

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Application: Online

Deadline: January 29, 2025

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Courtesy: buddy4study.com

Keep learning

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help



OFF THE EDGE

Nandini Raman

I am doing a B.E degree in Computer Science Engineering specialising in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. I want to improve my coding skills. What programming languages should I learn? Gayathri

Dear Gayathri,
Utilise platforms like LeetCode, HackerRank, CodeSignal, and CodeChef that offer a range of issues and competitions to help improve your problem-solving skills. Work on personal or open-source projects to apply your knowledge in real-world scenarios such as building chatbots, recommendation systems, or image classifiers. Enroll in online courses in AI, ML, and coding practices. Follow tutorials and channels on YouTube such as Corey Schafer, Sentdex, and 3blue1brown. Read books such as *Clean Code* by Robert C. Martin, *Python Machine Learning* by Sebastian Raschka, and *Deep Learning* by Ian Goodfellow. Familiarise yourself with official documentation, as it is crucial for effective coding and troubleshooting. Take part in coding competitions and hackathons. Participate in Kaggle competitions for machine learning projects. Join forums, communities, and local meetups to network. Contribute to open-source projects on GitHub. Learn Python, R, Java, C++, SQL, JavaScript and familiarise yourself with libraries and frameworks relevant to your specialisation, such as TensorFlow, PyTorch, NumPy, and Pandas.

What is the scope of the Bachelor of Occupational

Therapy course? Which institutes in India or abroad are good for this?

Sebastian

Dear Sebastian,
A Bachelor in Occupational Therapy (BOT) offers various opportunities to help individuals develop, recover, or maintain skills needed for daily life and work. It plays a crucial role in rehabilitation for individuals with physical, mental, or developmental conditions. You could be a clinician in hospitals, rehabilitation centres or private clinics, specialise in Paediatrics, Geriatrics or even get into Research. Some sought-after specialisations are in Hand Therapy, Sensory Integration, Ergonomics and Human Factors, Neurorehabilitation and Workplace Therapy and Rehabilitation.

Institutes to consider include AIIMS, New Delhi; College of Occupational Therapy, Mumbai; Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), Manipal; Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research, Chennai. University of Sydney and University of Queensland, Australia; King's College London, the U.K., and University of Toronto, Canada.

PG programmes include

Master's in Occupational Therapy (MOT) or Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MSOT) across universities in India and abroad. Specialisations can include paediatric therapy, geriatric therapy, and neurorehabilitation. You could also do a Ph.D. with advanced research opportunities focusing on clinical practices, innovative

techniques, and policy development.

I am doing B. Sc. in Visual Communication but am interested in drawing and painting. But I worry about whether I will survive as an artist. How can I pursue my passion and make a mark amid the doctors, engineers and CAs? Rhythm

Dear Rhythm,
Visual Communication will give you a strong foundation for a creative career. Work on your art and build a portfolio showcasing your best work in various styles and mediums. Display your work online on platforms such as Behance, ArtStation, and Instagram to reach a wider audience. Keep upgrading your skills and learn new techniques. Gain experience by freelancing and taking commissions for illustrations, paintings and so on. Websites like Fiverr, Upwork, and 99designs can help you find opportunities. Collaborate with other artists, and designers to expand your network and gain experience. Try to exhibit your work and connect with other artists and potential buyers. Take part in competitions and contests for visibility and validation of your work.

Network and seek mentors who can provide guidance, feedback, and advice. Integrate your skills and use your knowledge of filmmaking and animation to create unique art projects. Can you combine your passion for art with graphic design, digital media, or even storytelling? Explore career paths like being an illustrator (for books, magazines,

advertising, or digital media), concept art, art therapy, entrepreneurship through prints and merchandise. Finally, balance your passion with practical considerations.

I am pursuing a Master of Fine Arts (Painting) at Delhi University. What are the potential career paths, whether in the government or private sector? Moni

Dear Moni,
You can be a professional artist and display your work in galleries, art shows, and through solo exhibitions. You can also take on commissions for private clients, businesses, or organisations. You can be a curator, responsible for organising exhibitions, managing collections, and developing educational programmes or be a gallery manager. Another option is to run your own art and design studio and be an entrepreneur with art-related business or an online art shop. You can offer workshops, classes or tutorials to teach art. In the government sector, there are opportunities to work with agencies to manage projects as a public art coordinator or a cultural affairs officer. You can also for government institutions, museums, or historical sites to conserve and restore artworks and cultural artefacts, or become an art educator or researcher.

Other opportunities exist across art therapy, art licensing and merchandising, working with non-profits that support the arts, cultural preservation, or community art projects.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

Learning with honour

Institutions should build academic integrity by nurturing a community where honesty and respect for knowledge are embraced by all

Arunkumar Khannur

Education and its quality have a major say in building a sustainable and equitable nation. Educational integrity acts as the heart of the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of academic institutions and involves building an institutional eco-system with the help of principles such as honesty, fairness, and accountability in the pursuit of knowledge and excellence.

At its core, educational integrity deals with ethical and moral behaviour from students, teachers, and administrators by going beyond not being just legally right. Building academic integrity requires a commitment to honesty and a collective understanding of the importance of avoiding cheating, plagiarism, favouritism, and the misrepresentation of academic achievements. Any compromise leads to far-reaching consequences such as discredited qualifications, diminished reputations, and a breakdown in trust between educators and learners. In order to embrace integrity, we need to go beyond individual actions and create an environment where fairness and respect for intellectual property thrive.

Challenges

However, embracing educational integrity is not without its challenges. The first is the need to address the problems caused by rapid evolution of technology and the abundance of online resources, which is leading to a blurring of lines between ethical collaboration and plagiarism. Students have difficulty distinguishing between acceptable help and academ-

ic dishonesty. Additionally, the anonymity of the Internet has made it easier for them to engage in unethical behaviour without immediate consequences.

The intense pressure to perform, driven by family expectations, societal demands, and competitive job markets, also pushes students toward dishonest practices.

Many educational institutions have not yet developed a defined and well-structured policy regarding academic dishonesty, and the enforcement is often inconsistent. Some institutions even overlook violations to protect their reputation. What is necessary is a well-defined and comprehensive framework that has clear governing policies and consequences for violations. This should be developed in collaboration with students, faculty, and administrators. Next, an 'Integrity Task Force', which is responsible for reviewing policies regularly, promoting integrity initiatives, curating content, background verification of qualification of faculty, and ensuring that violations are addressed fairly across all departments, must be established.

It's also crucial to build an environment where employees feel safe to report any violations of integrity.

Role of technology

Technology can also be harnessed to prevent cheating and dishonest practices by installing plagiarism detection software and AI-based monitoring systems, introducing curated content and partners to identify and address unethical behavior. Online learning platforms, too, can help monitor student progress and detect inconsistencies that may indicate dishonest practices.

Creating a culture of integrity also requires promoting honesty, morality, ethics, trust and accountability within the student community. Students need to feel comfortable reporting dishonest behaviour and understand how their actions affect not only their academic careers but also their peers and the institution.

Online learning platforms, too, can help monitor student progress and detect inconsistencies that may indicate dishonest practices. Creating a culture of integrity also requires promoting honesty, morality, ethics, trust and accountability within the student community. Students need to feel comfortable reporting dishonest behaviour and understand how their actions affect not only their academic careers but also their peers and the institution.

Enforcing integrity policies consistently is one of the essential components to foster educational integrity. Students need to understand that violations will result in fair and predictable consequences. However, the focus should not be on punishment; instead, restorative practices to help students learn from their mistakes should be implemented.

Fostering educational integrity demands not only robust governing policies but also induction training that cultivates integrity from the beginning. Rather than relying on routine enforcement, institutions should strive to create a community where honesty and respect for knowledge are embraced by students, faculty, and administrators alike.

The writer is Chief Strategy Officer and Professor of Practice, CMR University, Bengaluru.



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