

How to make your do even better

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Dawn Education

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A CLASSROOM serves not only as a place for the child to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes but also serves as the best nursery for a teacher's personal and professional growth.

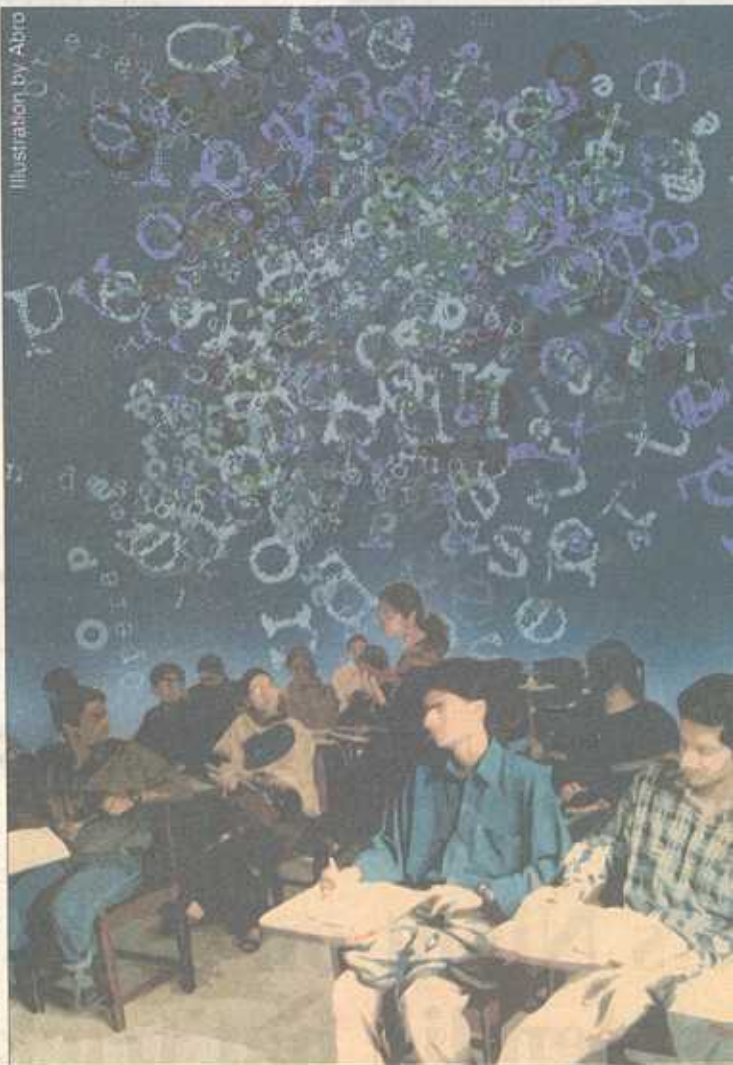
Unfortunately, the classroom has been under-utilized by our teachers. In the recent past, several measures have been suggested to improve the quality of teaching. The literature that is available via the internet has the potential to expand the knowledge base of many teachers. However, there has been no significant improvement generally in the practice of teaching, not least because teaching theories have been adopted without carefully taking into account the assumptions underpinning them. The result is that resources are wasted in trying to initiate a change that does not last for very long.

So what is the real solution to improve existing teaching/learning practices? Before answering this difficult but important question, let us begin with the assumption that no 'expert' from 'outside' will come to save us. It is the teachers themselves who will have to take charge of their own learning as well as the learning of their students. Secondly, the 'outsiders' do not know what the ground realities are. No person other than the principal or the classroom teacher is better informed about internal problems. Thirdly, the problems faced by the teacher are unique and require unique rather than generalized solutions. This means that the role of the teacher is not only to teach but also that of a problem-solver.

The most common complaint that one gets to hear from teachers is about their students. They usually complain that students are very careless and that they do not take enough interest in the class. Instead of finding fault with the student, a teacher should rather ask him/herself the question that what am I offering to the student? What are my teaching methods and why haven't they worked, are the kinds of questions teachers should be asking themselves when faced with such a situation. In short, a teacher should try to empathize with the perspective of the student if he or she is really interested in finding what has gone wrong. If done carefully, this is what we call reflective practice — to carefully analyze one's own practices and to study the effects of one's actions taken in order to improve such practices. There might be other reasons for the student's lack of interest. The best way to deal with such problems is to conduct what is called 'action research'.

This is a concept alien to even the more well established private schools. That, though, is understandable since the idea of 'action research' is only about twenty years old. Only in the late nineties has it gained wider recognition and acceptance, mostly in the educational systems of developed countries.

Illustration by Abiro



First of all, let us try to understand the meaning of 'action research'. It is a form of inquiry that impacts directly on a teacher's practice and empowers him or her to rejuvenate the classroom by taking certain actions and then carefully reflecting on the effects of these actions. Hence, it differs from formal research in the sense that its purpose is not to generate knowledge but to bring improvement in a particular method, in this case of teaching. 'I' is the key word in action research. It can be initiated in a single classroom, in a group of classes (for example, all sections of a particular grade level), or in a broader sense as collaboration between institutions.

This concept is also different because it dispenses with the normally understood requirement that research be carried out by 'experts'. Teachers and principals do not lie in the 'expert' category for conducting research and are unaware of rigorous research methodologies; therefore critics of this concept say that results of such research will not be reliable. Action research contradicts this because the teacher is assumed to be in the best position to take initiative and because he or she does not require any kind of rigorous