[**In-person learning**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1676957/in-person-learning)

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WITH relatively higher rates of absence in schools, return to in-person education has had a shaky start. A great deal of structural planning is necessary to help students settle into a positive learning environment. Given that the way we access education has changed dramatically, and the obvious learning gaps stare at us with gaping mouths, a whole new agenda is vital.

From a set of resources — including digital technology vis-à-vis smartboards, tablets and educational apps — to a new collection of library books more suited to supporting the emotional well-being of students, counsellors and coaches, an evolved landscape in planning and implementation will cushion learners in this uncertainty.

Many private schools have done well in creating a welcoming social environment. They allow greater flexibility for missed school days or delayed homework, consideration for Covid-stricken families, more fluid communication with teachers through various learning management systems, monitoring and effective help through WhatsApp etc. Some have established out-of-school online programmes to involve children in remedial classes, reading clubs and art therapy.

However, resources without expertise are like a car without fuel. The plans may be backed by lofty dreams and earnest intentions, but our students may not necessarily benefit from quick fixes based on trial and error. A road map put in place with sustainable strategies, coupled with professional development required for implementation would catch the bull by the horns or pluck out the rose from its thorns — for want of a better turn of phrase.

Teachers have had to don superhero capes.

In-person return to schooling is led by teachers who have not only been thrown into a frenzy of chasing curriculum goals, assessing students and bringing them up to speed, but are also called to action where their students’ dipped motivation needs attention, waning social skills need refinement and cognitive capabilities need sharpening. Teachers have had to don superhero capes to juggle responsibilities they have not taken on before. ‘This isn’t part of my job description’ isn’t a relevant statement anymore — across the board, most job descriptions have changed, evolved or been massively extended.

In fact, organisations that have failed to upgrade their employees’ professional development have found themselves derailed by ‘the great resignation’. Relative to other professions, in teaching the implications of this are quite severe as students become collateral damage when school leaders fail to rise to the challenge of meeting the requirements of teacher development. Part of the challenge is the critical task of action and reflection — implementation followed by a careful analysis of what went well and what can be done better.

Unfortunately, we don’t have meaningful monitoring structures in place, other than the customary classroom rounds by school heads, and often children are left in the hands of teachers who may be clueless about the demands of post-pandemic reopening and recovery. In this climate fraught with professional and personal challenges, teachers may also need some gentleness and care. Besides focusing on professional development, which has been acutely exacting for many, they may need ‘away days’ or a perhaps a day trip to a relaxing retreat.

Where that isn’t possible, team-building games, physical activities, a comedy hour or the like can lighten up a tedious day. Conversations about their own and their students’ recovery and well-being are important, in a focused and structured environment with the school management’s involvement. The teachers’ well-being is crucial as it determines how well they will model positive behaviour in the classroom, directly imp­a­­­cting their students’ mo­tivation and per­­­for­mance.

How many of us remember working enthusiastically for a morose teacher? Teachers who manage to make the classroom a space of comfort, fun and laughter elicit the greatest response and active engagement. Educators have known for decades that teacher well-being has a direct correlation to student learning and performance. However, we haven’t managed to focus on it as much as we have on the rituals and routines of the daily grind.

For school leaders, discipline on the school premises is paramount, and communal comfort and care pales in comparison. The Unesco 2020 report on Futures of Education points out how education needs to be rethought at every level, which includes revisiting our goals and expectations from students, providing a safe social space for them to thrive and protecting their rights.

In this world of inequality and uncertainty, it is impossible for learners to thrive at the same pace. Rather than resisting the reality, finding productive methods to nurture our students’ capabilities requires skill, strategy and resilience from our teachers.

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