**[Let students thrive](https://www.dawn.com/news/1815391/let-students-thrive)**

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The writer is a teacher, educator, author, and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, UK. The views expressed are her own and do not reflect those of her employer.

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WE’VE had a history of academic pressure to chase marks in tests, good grades at the end of the term and, in many schools, students still get ranks that benchmark them against their peers. Most assessments test the preparation of content; they do not test understanding of concepts. Students select the more ‘important’ content they know they will be tested on, and memorise that. Studying skills aren’t necessarily taught, which means students must learn these skills on the go. Those that haven’t mastered the art of preparation or the ones who haven’t managed to develop the endurance to focus and write material from memory do not manage to get good marks as they have not mastered test-taking skills.

When teachers are truly skilled, they aren’t only great at teaching but also guiding and monitoring. Traditionally, the teachers who have made a lasting impact on their students are the ones who focus on holistic development — those that are skilled enough to teach, motivate students and enable them to thrive.

Usually, these teachers empower students with a level of self-confidence that makes them able and willing to learn. They teach them the ropes to break down tasks to make it easier for themselves and they encourage them to plan ahead of time so they can acquire greater control on the mountain of work that comes their way. Most successful teachers keep a close eye on the students’ studying habits, their turning in of assignments, their responses in class and their interest in their own progress.

Thriving is not just about learning but also about the willingness to do better and the innate drive to accomplish the next big task. Student motivation is key to learning. However, unfortunately, most teachers manage to kill motivation by warnings and threats of failure and disaster. How teachers connect and communicate with students may be the key to enabling students to thrive. A teacher’s positivity and belief in the student’s ability can turn the tide towards progress.

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Most students need health and well-being programmes at school to support them through their academic journey. Back in 1995, when WHO, Unesco and Unicef jointly introduced the ‘health promoting schools’ approach, 90 countries around the world adopted it. Pakistan was not one of them. Ninety per cent of countries now provide at least one meal during the school day. Pakistan is not one of them.

Clean water and sanitation, eye-testing services, a doctor on the premises and vaccine administration and monitoring facilities, counselling were all part of the health programme. In 2010, Pakistan collaborated with Unesco after a report established that 61pc of government schools in Pakistan lacked drinking water and a staggering 56pc were without toilet facilities. A decade later, basic facilities are available in a fragmented and inconsistent manner, if at all.

The global Education 2030 agenda, initiated by Unesco, reiterates a set of eight Global Standards to help improve the lives of one billion school-going children. Pakistan has committed to these goals and yet, given the scale of the improvements needed, we may well miss this bus too.

In the absence of such programmes across the board, teachers have an all-encompassing role at school where they have to plug in their expertise to fill in many gaps. They have to screen students for bad eyesight by using their own judgement in class, they write to parents to monitor nutrition when the child doesn’t bring in a healthy snack, they act as first-aid respondents when children are hurt and they provide emotional support in the absence of school counsellors. The list is endless and the teachers’ duties go far beyond their ba­­sic job description. In many scho­ols, teachers find themselves having to don their superwomen capes to take care of every contingency, and this can well take them away from their core work as a subject specialist.

While every school year presents new challenges, it also opens new opportunities for growth. Relaxing the controlling grip on children may help them find learning fun. Instead of forcing them to read from their books, reading to them may help. Letting them teach whatever they know may help them get more involved in learning. Enabling them to track their own progress and set goals helps them take responsibility and develop a work ethic.

There is a world of possibilities where different strategies can be applied to achieve targeted outcomes, especially if the tried and tested means are not yielding results. Ignacio Estrada said it aptly: “If a child can’t learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn.”

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