[**Online myths**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1636976/online-myths)

[Neda Mulji](https://www.dawn.com/authors/8398/neda-mulji)Published July 26, 2021 - Updated 2 days ago

The writer is working as senior manager, professional development, Oxford University Press, Pakistan.

THEY say it takes a village to raise a child and, while this old adage may have been true in the bygone days, in the age of the pandemic it seems exactly the opposite is true. Nuclear families have been broken into even smaller units as family members try to maintain distancing to keep each other safe. Many have had to shift focus away from their children to take care of ailing parents, especially those who have multiple health conditions. Whatever the family structure, healthcare has become the primary concern of millions and, much as we would all like to continue to focus on education, the learning gaps our children have suffered threaten to loom over us in the foreseeable future.

How schools choose to approach the continuity of teaching and learning is left to a select few leaders who have enabled their teachers through a process of digital transformation. Well-versed, experienced teachers are not the key to this learning; on the contrary, those who are able to seize the reins of a growing need for technology, especially interactive apps, have been able to communicate, engage and monitor their students as they adapt to a vastly different learning environment.

The very essence of what constitutes a ‘good’ teacher has changed dramatically. Someone who knows how to drive a car may not necessarily be able to manoeuvre a truck as skilfully. The switch to online teaching has not only been brutally sudden, with its multiple challenges, but also demanding of alien approaches that call for much more beyond basic understanding. The premise of knowing how to teach online may lie in being able to use a computer and conduct classes on a learning platform but the methodologies that help children access deep and meaningful education are a whole different ball game.

Knowing how to teach online and becoming an effective online teacher are vastly different terrains. Many of us encounter roadblocks in trying to replicate face-to-face teaching methods, cover content as was expected previously and give ‘homework’ to support in-class learning. The bare truth may be that all work is now essentially homework — online learning demands much more from the student in terms of learning how to learn, use the internet more frequently for information, take recourse in videos and apps that can supplement the teacher’s time, give way to curiosity and extend the boundaries of what they are expected to know.

With millions facing school closures, we have decisions to make.

It’s the “lure of the open road” to quote a former US president, and much of online learning has to do with exploring where that road will take us and how astute our teachers can be in steering that course towards the age-appropriate student learning outcomes that have been established. The process involves helping students adapt to the new learning environment, enabling them to master the online tools, empowering them to find and collate information, perhaps in collaboration with peers, and then presenting their learning in written assessments or otherwise. Simply knowing how to log in and attend class is a manifestation of passive learning at best and keeps us comfortably encased in the myth that we have successfully adapted our teaching methods to the new norm of online learning.

Digital migration is eerily similar to moving to a new country. We may learn to adopt a new way of life enough to sail through our days, but may not necessarily assimilate sufficiently to live meaningfully, derive fulfilment and contribute to our adopted society. Rather than stay on the margins and develop a narrative that lists an array of challenges and difficulties, we might want to consider changing our perspective towards opportunity and growth, search for the support and resources we need and equip ourselves to empower our students. As an example, a teacher who wanted to lend further support to students for whom class time on Zoom was not sufficient, developed her own learning hub with a series of podcasts that students could listen to in their own time.

As online communities and learning platforms gain momentum globally, we have all had an untimely but necessary push towards digital migration, and the quicker we learn to become citizens of this brave new world, the sooner we can feel at home with online teaching. As 1.2 billion children in 186 countries continue to be affected by school closures, we have choices to make. We can either continue to struggle and complain about the challenges of online learning, or work towards solutions that will bolster teachers’ capabilities.

As sceptics question the effectiveness of online learning, research shows that online learning improves student retention and takes less time than the same content would in a face-to-face classroom, if only we could debunk the myths about online teaching.

*The writer is working as senior manager, professional development, Oxford University Press, Pakistan.*

*Published in Dawn, July 26th, 2021*