[**Purpose and passion**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1672436/purpose-and-passion)

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AS our children’s world continues to be riddled with unexpected closures, staggered attendance and uncertainty about term timelines, we remain in the throes of learning the ropes of digital education. Those who were looking forward to going back to a pre-Covid world of physical teaching, and ready to breathe a sigh of relief having flung out online tools, find themselves facing technological demons again. As a teacher aptly put it, “our demons will rest when we face them”.

Avoiding technology — especially as it appears to be the future of education — is not the solution. Not only are our modes of content delivery changing, we have to now adapt to a completely different style of assessments. Opting for open book exams, online testing mechanisms, evidence of learning portfolios and graded projects, are all exciting replacements for the age-old invigilated exams that required more grit and nerve than intelligence and subject expertise.

Interestingly, educators have now got the chance to re-evaluate the skills that are needed and relevant. When we consider how many students have suffered emotional instability through the pandemic, school leaders may have to take steps to address well-being before curriculum duties. Lots of revamping is long overdue. Many people don’t consider teaching a ‘real’ job — traditionally, it’s been done by people who are not necessarily working for bread and butter like other jobs, but for purpose and passion. Part of that meant revamping thoughts, trends, and approaches on a need basis, ongoing learning and consistent firefighting. That has been the reality of our teaching jobs since time immemorial. The pandemic has only brought the abyss of demands on an educator to the surface.

It is pertinent to revisit the purpose of what we teach.

A teacher’s purpose encompasses many aspects of students’ learning from cognitive skills to physical and emotional well-being, from inculcating social skills and cultural values to enthusiasm and ambition. Indeed, the child’s footing in the world and how well grounded they become is part of a teacher’s daily responsibility and contributes to their higher purpose. Many carry emotional baggage back home long after school hours are over. Still more will describe their students as ‘my children’. The all-encompassing role of teachers begs the question: what are we doing as a society to support this passion?

Teachers’ own sense of well-being is important to sustain the purpose and passion they bring to the table. Regular check-ins by the school management, upfront conversations about difficulties faced, making resources available, encouraging teachers to share the challenges rather than brush them under the carpet would be a good place to start. The need for ‘check-ins’ is more acute now, as we rely on screens that separate us from a physical connection, and those off-the-pitch conversations commonly described as ‘water cooler moments’ where we indulge in menial yet very valuable conversations with colleagues.

The purpose of such conversations is to improve camaraderie at the workplace, as well as — what the OECD terms — the subjective well-being of teachers which is a measure of how they feel in their day-to-day lives. Teacher well-being carries high stakes as students often mirror their teachers and good and bad moods are equally infectious. Decades ago, Haim Ginott, a teacher educator and psychologist, said teachers have the power to ‘hurt or heal’ and it is their response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated.

As we go through many pandemic waves and each week presents a new crisis in our students’ lives, it might be pertinent to revisit the purpose of what we teach and enable different models of engaging children. More game-based learning in classes, hands-on projects to be done at home in those free lockdown hours and more direction to steer children towards constructive and focused activity on screens — tasks that focus on student learning outcomes — may help mitigate some of the learning losses. Some schools have initiated community-based activities such as cycling together, or making cards for children at orphanages, picking up litter at the beach or park and take pictures for a class presentation on it, or a virtual class party where everyone gets free time to connect.

Activities that encourage purpose and passion give a deeper meaning to learning — sometimes, all it requires is a creative twist to the content. Children respond when we start using their syllabus material slightly differently. Bringing textbooks to life would imply having children experiment in real life with tasks embedded there, instead of spending hours on worksheets. There is much that can serve to build future skills, rather than sticking to age-old methods that are more akin to fitting a circle into a square.

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