Teaching for future BY N E D A M U L J l | 3/2/2020

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| THERE is a strange paradox at play in today`s world. On the one hand, there is panicat theintense pressure thatstudents have to face and, on the other, there is anxiety over not doing enough. Children who are too ambitious are frowned upon for being part of the so-called rat race or cutthroat competition. Those not doing enough are given flak equally. This kind of tug of war threatens the integrity of our education system which should ideally be gearing up to develop 21st-century skills to equip our students for the fast-evolving, sitcom-like world that we now live in.  Learners are wrought with choices and pressures that throw them into the deep end ofthis pressure.  When we talk about goals and aspirations,theideaisnot to create aratrace,but to keep the spirit and fire alive for setting benchmarks and goals; as Dr Stephen Covey said, `Your most important work is always ahead of you, never behind you` More than the choices and the pressures, perhaps ourenergiesare betteroffinvested in a vision of, and hope for, the future.  Amongst a host of other skills, there are some essential tools that teachers can potentially focus on for 21st-century learning. Time management stands at the head of the multitasking requirements of our fast-moving digital world. Amongst the choices on offer, students often get lost in a world of resources and infotainment and struggle to sift out effective and useful content. In a traditional classroom, they took down notes and focused on reproducing the material.  As we move towards the four Cs of 21st century learning critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication, learners have to manage expectations on several fronts. Using the four Cs, they evaluate, analyse and contribute to the knowledge base, connect and collaborate with more people than ever before and respond to a very demanding schedule. The volume of work expected of them is unprecedented and if they have not learnt to categorise, organise and prioritise according to a time schedule, it becomes increasingly difficult to achieve set targets.  This is a pandemic across all stages of learning there seems to be a split between expectations and ability. To use an analogy, grass that is watered sparingly in several areas cannot grow to become fiercely green it remains weak and wilting, as the area of focus is too wide and the effort insufficient. Perhaps the main difference between deep and surface learning emerges from such fragmented multitasking.  Perhaps we could add two more `Cs` tothe mix and exercise compassion to help produce conHdence in learners so that they can prioritise their area offocus and make sound choices. Compassion may be crucialin enablingstudents tounderstand that mistakes are part of growth it provides them with the comfort of resilience through failure. It spurs independence with the knowledge that they have the ability to bounce back.  We often talk about independence of thought, responsibility and self-management as essential tools for future learning needs, but these may not be practicable without a core ability or confidence to prioritise choices. The vast world of information may be useless if students do not acquire the skills to be able to navigate it.  The navigational tools lend structure and purpose to students` learning ability and the results follow suit. Chasing results without these building blocks often creates aweb-like situation where learners are stuck where the pressure to stay and fight builds up alongside the desire to give up and accept failure.  We cannot control the results of our efforts, but we can be aware of where we are headed.  Teachers as mentors often come across children who do not have a plan in mindand with all our best intentions, we pose the question: `what do you want to do with your life?` This is the more modern version of the age-old question: `what do you want to be when you grow up?` The truth is, children do not know and shouldn`t be expected to know.  They are born into a world of endless possibilities and their thoughts, dreams and goals will evolve on a daily basis. The confidence to make choices in a world of possibilities develops ambition in learners, and confident learners know how to assess their ability. Their performance and success may depend on those choices. Much like fire, ambition is a double-edged sword it can only harm if not utilised with caution towards constructive aims. As Einstein put it aptly: `Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.` The writer works at Oxford University Press, Pakistan.  neda.mulji@gmail.com Twitter: @nedamulji |