

● DEFINING 'QUALITY' IS TOUGH

Measuring innovation in education

Innovation should come in our thinking, not merely in equipping our classrooms

BALAKRISHNA PISUPATI

STATISTICS ON HOW on how Indian educational institutions are faring in academics and R&D vis-à-vis global institutions are a regular news item. Going through these, I have always questioned myself what is the innovation we wish to bring in today's education? Is it more sophisticated classrooms, more facilities at hostels providing a range of extracurricular activities, larger expanse of campuses or higher quality of education?

Throughout history, people have attempted innovation in education, starting from Socrates to Aristotle to now. The only change is that the shift has been from 'learning' to 'use of technology' as the focus.

Defining 'quality' is tough. It depends on one's background, social status and state of mind. For a rural family, quality of education might mean ensuring decent classrooms, three meals per day to provision of school uniform and books, while for the rich it could be technological edge of the school, provisions for activities such as fencing and horse-riding, to AC hostels and classrooms.

If one goes by the assertion that education is about all-round development of an 'individual' (I'm not using the word 'student'

here), it has to be about 'learning' rather than 'educating'. So, when does one learn? When there is freedom of thought, ability to understand, applying the understanding to real situations and being able to ascertain on how and why some things work and some don't. It may sound abstract, but it is this innovation we need in education right now.

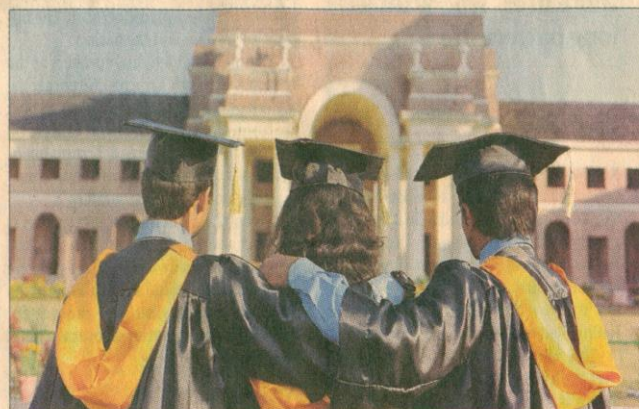
With regulatory and statutory provisions outdated, there is limited innovation institutions could attempt. I may wish to teach conservation psychology, but I can only offer a Master's degree in life sciences since the UGC doesn't allow any nomenclature other than those set decades ago. If so, how are we going to make our youngsters learn if they are denied opportunities to innovate in their education streams? If I offer a degree in 'drone traffic management', the student will never be able to get a job in the country, forget about getting a degree first!

Several universities claim innovation in teaching, but where is the innovation in learning? A lot of emphasis is on interdisciplinary education. But if we have no trained teachers who understand the basics of inter- and transdisciplinarity, how are we going to train and mentor the learners?

How do we innovate?

It is possible if we make our teachers and researchers unlearn and relearn. But there is no focus nor an opportunity to do this. So, we continue to publicise innovation in education that is more in preaching than practice.

Towards that, there are three ways to un-



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derstand innovation in education:

Redefine fundamentals: The fundamental concept of teaching should be replaced by the concept of learning;

Be a mentor: Teachers should transform themselves as 'mentors' than merely being 'teaching concepts' they pass on;

Test your understanding: Those seeking learned men/women should not merely go by the titles of the degree they have, but by testing the understanding applicants have to deal with real situations. For this, we should innovate in teaching our mentors, training our students and transforming our employers. We should do away with churning out people with one objective in mind—getting a job, irrespective of one's interests and passion, to 'settle' in life.

Innovation should come in our thinking, not merely in equipping our classrooms.

*The author is vice-chancellor,
Transdisciplinary University, Bengaluru.
Views are personal*