

Going back to classrooms:

Preparing for transition from online to offline classes

~ Sujata C



As the world went under lockdown to combat the dreaded COVID-19 virus, we bore witness to a new reality which seemed like a page out of an HG Wells novel. Classrooms were no more the rows of desks and chairs facing a teacher's desk but a virtual room constituting mugshots of teachers and learners. The personal touch of a whispered conversation between two friends during a class or a teacher's appreciative pat on the back were replaced by the paraphernalia of what constituted an Internet-based device or instrument. It had a deep impact on the psyche of both adults and children as we tried to come to terms with these drastic changes. Now once again, when schools reopen after months of lockdown, school management along with educators and parents have to ensure a slow but gradual transition to a new reality. Safety and good health of students will be top priority for most school administrators and teachers. For one thing we cannot predict what shape the pandemic will take in the months to come. As of now we are all busy adjusting to the lifestyle changes brought on by the pandemic in order to safeguard our lives. But life must go on, and so we will readjust ourselves and come to terms with the new normal. Thus when children would come back to school, teachers will have to help them acclimatise themselves to the newness of the school brought on by the pandemic and ease them into the familiar yet evolved old school routines.

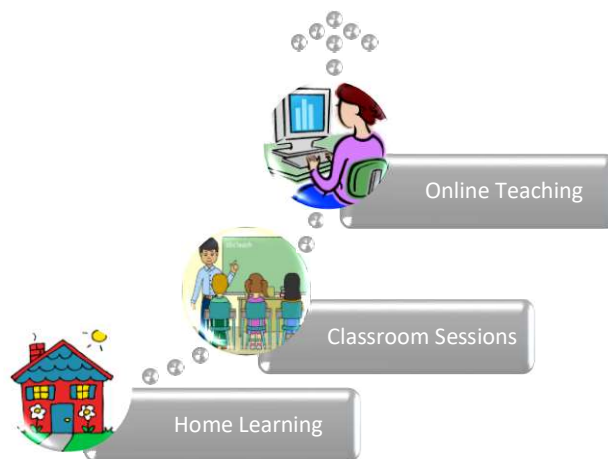
Many thought leaders have been advocating a total reimagining of the schooling scenario as they see this pandemic as a precipitating point and a good opportunity to do so. Scientists are saying that the virus is not likely to disappear anytime soon and we have to learn to live with it for a year or more,



till an effective vaccine is available. This means there maybe waves of the pandemic; it will surge and it will pull back depending on conditions suitable for its survival. This means there might be brief lockdowns during virus surge and unlocking as it subsides. We are seeing voluntary lockdown in busy city areas where cases are high. How to reopen schools safely depends on the location of the school – red, orange or green zone. The status may change from time to time and accordingly the operations have to be scaled up or down. Some state education authorities have

already announced a truncated syllabus in view of the shortened academic calendar.

Blended learning scenario looks like the way forward for schools as they will have to balance a combination of classroom teaching, home learning and online teaching.



Experts say that the virus needs half an hour of exposure to get passed on effectively. Since students will spend five to six hours, rigorous safety protocol must be followed. School management must review all space available – grounds, play courts, or alternative buildings that can be converted into spacious classrooms. Social distancing will continue,

which means larger areas are required which may not be possible at all times, explore possibilities – can the school ground be converted into makeshift classrooms. Conduct classes in shifts to accommodate all. Portable mike cum

speaker systems may be required if classes are held in the hall or ground. Some standard measures to follow could include:

1. Mask becomes a part of the school uniform.
2. Standard practice of sanitization of hand hold bars, seats and doors in school buses becomes mandatory.
3. Outsiders to be strictly prohibited from entering the school premises.
4. Multiple entry and exit points to avoid crowding in the morning and once school gets over.
5. Regular and frequent sanitisation of classrooms before school begins, during school hour and after.
6. Staggered schedules: Classes can be held on alternate days – classroom teaching followed by tasks to complete at home.
7. Having classes in shift system is a good idea.
8. Morning assembly will have to be done away with for the time being as gatherings are a strict no.
9. Health education: This is a good time to focus on forming good habits in students that improve health.
10. Cafeteria practices – no sharing food – Bring your own food and water policy. Eating lunch in the classroom itself can be advocated. If midday meals are being provided, due care needs to be taken by the food handlers to ensure food safety.
11. Washroom practices: Put up posters near the wash area on how to wash hands. Washroom staff should ensure social distancing and prevent students from lingering there.
12. Take a good hard look at the curriculum. Make the most of the face time classroom sessions for offline teaching and save what is relatively easy and can be tackled through online lessons. Since the academic year has been truncated, the syllabus also needs to be downsized suitably.
13. Sports: Examine all sports and games to see which can be picked under the given conditions. Select those that are low risk and avoid touch games. Include games where it is easy to maintain distance – badminton, table tennis etc. Nature walk, exercising outdoors, athletics are also low risk activities.

14. Society has taken a hard hit psychologically due to the pandemic. Many have been economically impacted while many have faced sudden bereavement. Schools must take the initiative in normalising things as far as possible. Organise social and emotional support – have



counsellors around to ameliorate the trauma induced by the pandemic and provide mental health support. Schedule pep talks by senior teachers and Principal to keep up the morale of students. Encourage an openness to share any mental health issues as it will help destigmatise such problems. If some students want to discuss their loss of loved ones, do not stop them.

15. Stigmatising those who come from COVID afflicted families is common and students must be sensitised about this. The fight must be against the ailment not against the patient.

16. Since the academic year will see a combination of classroom teaching and home learning, it might be a good idea to schedule more projects into the lessons. This will help in self-learning, learning by doing. You could make your evaluation based on creativity, critical thinking and problem solving done by the students.

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has changed our world. The scale of this change will only be understood with the passage of time as we take unsure steps into an uncertain future. Effectiveness of online teaching is still being debated, but at the moment that it is the only solution to keep the academic year afloat. At the time of writing this, one state government discontinued online classes for students up to class five on grounds of stress. However, it is being argued that children who easily watch television shows for hours at a stretch should be able to handle a few hours of lessons online. So while it sounds very fancy to say that our students are learning online, clearly the jury is still out. For many teachers the learning curve is steep. Many teachers have tried several ways to bridge the digital distance, sometimes it has worked and sometimes not. The child also needs their parents' support as well as additional stamina to negotiate the new ways of learning. Remember all this is happening under the long and dark shadow of a life threatening virus all around. Definitely there will be issues

with concentration and memory retention. There will be learning fatigue and teachers must factor in the learning loss that occurs due to all this.

To address the issue of lack of Internet, Central Institute of Educational Technology (CIET) has developed pre-recorded content related to classes 1 to 12 and broadcasts this for six hours. This is repeated three times a day to make it available 24X7 on DTH TV Swayam Prabha channel. Considering the locked down conditions, telecast of contents and telecast timings has been extended and made flexible. Schools in remote areas where Internet signals are a problem must make use of this medium to fill any teaching gaps that occur. There are instances where members of the teaching community have found innovative ways of communicating across a medium that is cheap and yet easily accessible, like the community radio.

On school's demand, Oxford University Press has also been recording lessons where authors of popular titles have pitched in to give demonstrations on how lessons may be taught online, so as to make them comprehensible, well-paced and interactive. These demonstrations of 40-45 minute sessions use specific topics from the curriculum so as to show how to pace the lesson segments, simulate the presence of learners by playing host to a group of learners, incorporate interactive components like taking responses from the learners through the microphone or chat box, asking learners to post responses on WhatsApp, and by putting learners into discussion groups through virtual rooms, and monitoring and supporting these discussions.

Ministry of Human Resources and Development has already initiated a new National Curriculum Framework for schools that will serve as a roadmap for NCERT. By October, NCERT will release material necessary to explain the learning outcomes for each subject for primary classes. Guidelines on learning outcomes for the secondary classes will follow by March 2021. This will make life a lot easier for teachers and students alike.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be a litmus test for the quality of our education system. It is in fact an opportunity in disguise. If the education community as a whole can tackle this opportunity intelligently, we will perhaps be able to mould the system for the betterment of the students.

Sujata C is a writer and editor with more than thirty years of experience. She writes on children, environment, society, as well as technology. She has also been a copywriter with advertising agencies for over fifteen years.

Lesson Plan: Going back to classrooms

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It will be a giant leap forward once schools and other educational institutions begin to open. Managements must make safe return-to-schools policy a priority. There is no one-size-fits-all strategy and each school must devise a plan according to its needs. Here are a few suggestions for assistance along with some activities for children to ease the back-to-school routine.

1. Set up a team of IT experts to help teachers with online teaching to ease the experience.
2. Be in touch with health authorities and the government school education department as they will provide support to schools in handling the academic calendar.
3. Curate games, songs and stories that give hope and positive feelings, and share them with students. This will help improve the emotional health of students.
4. Give time for discussions and open heart talks. This will be very cathartic for students and help them to offload feelings of fear, distress and sadness.
5. Help students to acquire some skills that only a pandemic can offer especially socially useful and productive work (SUPW) that will improve the confidence levels of students and divert their mind.
6. Let students prepare posters on hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and social distancing.
7. Allow the class to limber up mentally by playing some brain games before starting the session. This is because the pressure of living with virus is playing on the mind, and affecting memory and concentration.
8. Ask students to take a break after every hour and do some eye exercises and blink more often while watching the screen. This is because online classes take a toll on eye health and computer vision syndrome is likely to be common.
9. Have students prepare a chart for a healthy diet during Covid pandemic.

10. Appoint a monitor for hand hygiene routine to follow during class hours.



11. Similarly, appoint a social distance monitor, whose job it is to keep checking that distance protocol is being followed.

12. Assign the task of checking face mask to another student. Children will love to shoulder the responsibility and even make a game out of following these safety protocols.

13. Reading stories is a good way to cope with fears and frustrations.



‘My Hero is You’ is a story that tells how kids can fight COVID-19, developed by Inter Agency Standing Committee on Mental Health, UNICEF

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-04/My%20Hero%20is%20You%2C%20Storybook%20for%20Children%20on%20COVID-19.pdf>

- Mike’s Dirty, Yucky, Tacky, Sticky Adventure by Justine Korman Fontes: a story on the benefits of cleanliness for young children.
- Many children will be reluctant to come to school after being at home for so long. This book is ideal for such kids: There's No Place Like School: Classroom Poems by Jack Prelutsky

- Teachers can also source stories on bravery and courage for children.

14. Writing: Let each student write down what he or she wishes would happen this year.



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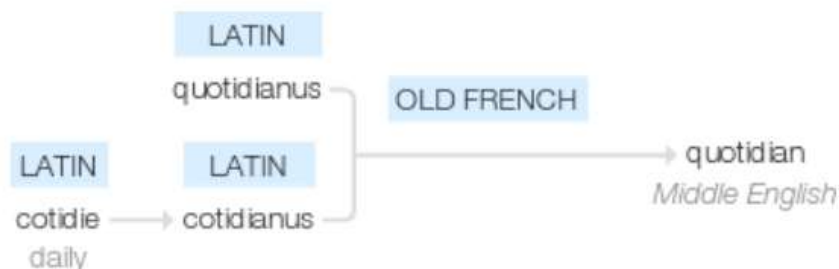
Quotidian (adjective)

QUOTIDIAN

Pronunciation: /kwɒ'tɪdiən/

Meaning: Of or occurring every day or daily; ordinary; every day; mundane

Origin and additional information: The word originated in Middle English where it arrived via Old French from Latin *quotidianus*, earlier *cotidianus*, from *cotidie* meaning 'daily'.



It has also usage in medical terms where it denotes a malignant form of malaria.

Use over time for: quotidian



Word section: The term *quotidian* is used to denote something ordinary in a rather fancy way. Quotidian events are the everyday details of life which are normal, familiar and mundane. Shakespeare in *As You Like It* makes the character Rosalind observe that Orlando, who has been running about in the woods carving Rosalind's name on trees and hanging love poems on branches, "seems to have the quotidian of love upon him".¹ However, this use does not necessarily make it clear that the word *quotidian* derives from a Latin word meaning "every day". But his use of the word is a semantic step away from the "daily" adjective sense.

The *quotidian* is the sense of a life built up through our daily experience, by everyday habits, the sedimentation of ordinary expectations of the world. It also denotes the tensions between the regularity of the familiar and necessary innovation. The quotidian is that mundane background of the ordinary in contrast to which new discoveries emerge and we are left surprised. Indeed, it is a necessary condition for surprise, the regularity in contrast to which something new and unexpected occurs.

Usage:

1. *What if they declare that it's time for the public to be told some of the hard truths about the intelligence community's quotidian operations?*
(Source: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/quotidian>)
2. *In the opening set piece, a husband and wife breakfast together, a setting so quotidian its very normality is suspicious.*
(Source: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/quotidian>)
3. *Many of the 17th-century artist's paintings centre on women engaging in quotidian tasks such as reading, writing and playing musical instruments.*
(Source: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/hague-shares-new-insights-vermeers-girl-pearl-earring-180974775/>)

¹ In the play, Frederick usurped the duchy and exiled his older brother, Duke Senior and later banishes his daughter, Rosalind from court once he finds out about Orlando's love for Rosalind. She flees to the Forest of Arden disguised as a young man where she lives disguised as Ganymede. Orlando too is forced to flee and take refuge in the Forest of Arden after being persecuted by his brother. Orlando, still smitten by love, was seen posting simplistic love poems for Rosalind on the trees.