

# 1 The art and craft of teaching practice: a 21st-century Indian perspective

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TODAY two key epistemological values continue to dominate, drive and direct education, both in terms of setting research agendas and as a basis for formulating praxis. The first is cognition and the second is context. It is my view that all teaching practice needs more than a deep understanding of each of these values. It also needs a deliberate decision by a teacher or research scholar to choose or foreground one more than the other. This is an act of conscious choice and one that creates the background against which the chapters in this book may be read.

Cognition as a value or a driving force in education draws from its position as a 'new' science; one that is inherently interdisciplinary and one which looks at the construction of understanding as a process that is located within the brain and its conscious active mind. Many theorists would and have argued that cognition is neutral and is consequently independent of culture, of class and of other social and economic factors. Much contemporary educational research into learning and into teaching methods reflects a growing awareness of this science and of this point of view. Developing brain-compatible learning, addressing the intelligences, scaffolding instruction, working within zones of proximal development and creating meaningful communities of practice are all positions on methods that draw from research on cognition and on the physiology of the brain itself.

Context on the other hand is far from neutral; it is locative, it is temporal and it is personal. It is located in the here and in the now

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-72754-9 - Reflections on Teaching Today and Tomorrow

Edited by Paul Beedle and Bob Burkill

Excerpt

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and places the individual's learning within the framework of other larger social, economic and cultural structures. Theorists who advocate the foregrounding of context ask for a greater role for popular culture, for all learning to foreground sustainable thinking, issues of social justice and to create safe havens for learning, spaces where the marginalised, the oppressed or the disabled can experience that equity in learning which they cannot experience in their daily life.

In a non-ideal and everyday world, teaching practice is located on a continuum between cognition and context. By locating their own position on this continuum, teachers can redefine their own practice, realising that, instead of dealing primarily with delivery of content and the achievement of specified outcomes, teaching today can be described as both an art and a craft.

Describing contemporary teaching practice as an art draws attention to the need to balance the imaginative and emotional realms of learning; to address both the senses and sensibilities of the learners and to create dynamic balance between forms of knowledge and their representation.

Viewing teaching practice as a craft highlights the nature of tools or the kind of materials chosen. The teacher as a craftsperson reflects deeply about form of knowledge and function of learning. The teacher is creative in the use of the hand and proficient at visual and perceptual thinking.

The art and craft of teaching is a 21st-century perspective that blends pedagogy with process in a very practical and creative manner. I am really happy to set the scene for the chapters that follow, written by practising teachers in India, giving us their reflections on developing new teaching approaches and facilitating active learning.