Kings College
info@kingscollege.edu.np
+977 1 5325909 | 015324520 | 015324574

19 Things a Teacher Can Do in 2019 (Part 1) ||Articles||

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Contributors

19 Things a Teacher Can Do in 2019 (Part 1)

Dear teachers, The new year 2019 does not align perfectly with our academic year. But we can still make a few new year resolutions on how to improve our teaching. Because, what better time than now!
In this article series, we'll be sharing teaching tips and ideas that we've been implementing in our own classes. We've borrowed these ideas from books, articles, YouTube videos, conversations, and many trials and errors in our classes and workshops we conduct. Please reflect on them and come up with your own theories on how to implement or adapt them to suit your needs.

1. Give space to try, fail and rise

> Wouldn't it be amazing if students could see the teachers themselves trying, failing, and learning in front of their students!

We've all heard this Nepali proverb "Hidne maanchhe ladchha". Perhaps, we can put this proverb in practice, and let our learners "fall" and learn from their "falls".

We know making a mistake and consciously reflecting on the mistake is an extremely effective way to learn. Such learning also endures for years.

Teachers can help students embrace mistakes by explaining the subtle but important difference between 'failure' and 'failing'. Failing sounds like it has hope attached to it. Failure sounds like you are doomed.

But simply telling students, "Hey, make mistakes and learn from your mistakes" is not enough. Telling usually doesn't work. What might work is developing a positive learning culture where students receive non-judgmental feedback on their learning process rather than on the outcome. A culture where students not just hear about but internalize the usefulness of failing is an integral part of learning.

Also, wouldn't it be amazing if students could see the teachers themselves trying, failing, and learning in front of their students!

Check out A.J. Juliani's excellent article entitled "The Big Difference between Fail-ing and Fail-ure" available online.

2. Give meaningful feedback

Generalized feedback usually doesn't help

John Hattie, the author of Visible Learning, says effective feedback has to answer three questions.

a. What is the goal?

b. What is the progress made toward the goal?

c. What actions need to be taken to make better progress?

Therefore, when students are trying and failing, we need to remind them of their goal, how they are doing, and what they can do better to achieve it.

For instance, if a student is struggling to write better, more persuasive essays, you could give them a list of things they've done wrong, and tell them to correct them all. Or, you could focus on one aspect of the essay (e.g. lacks proper evidence to back their points), and guide him on how to look for such evidence and incorporate it into their essay.

Remember, generalized feedback usually doesn't help. Saying "Good job" or "Terrible work" or "Nice" doesn't help students get to their goals.

For more, read this phenomenal research article.

Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007). The Power of Feedback. Review of Educational Research. Vol. 77. 1.

3. Don't give 4

Don't give them 4. Give them 2+2

If you haven't watched this Ted Talk "The Clues to a Great Story" by Andrew Stanton, the main guy from Pixar, an American computer animation film studio, watch it first. Because, he unpacks some intriguing clues to great teaching.

He says great stories get the audience involved in the storytelling process. How? Here we paraphrase Stanton.

Don't give everything to the audience easily.

Challenge them to predict.

Don't give them "4" right away.

Make them work for it.

Give them "2" first, and then allow them to imagine their own "2".

He calls this the "Unifying Theory of 2+2". It's a very powerful idea from a pedagogical perspective.

As teachers, we give it all away rather soon. We assume, “Our job is to give the correct answers. That’s what teachers are supposed to do, right?”

Partly yes, but mostly no.

A teacher’s job, apparently, is to make students work to get that answer.

Let us re-write that again.

A teacher’s job is to make students care about what they do, engage them in the process, and then guide them just enough so that they are able to figure out answers their own way.

Don’t give them 4. Give them 2+2.

We’ll share more in our next piece. We want to leave you with a quote from our friend Ulma-maija Seppanen: “Every feedback is a gift.” We too expect feedback from you.

This article was originally published in The Annapurna Express *on February 12th, 2019.*