



SIES School of Learning and Leadership Development (SIELLLD)

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on

Managing Large Classes: Major Challenge Before Educators

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Backdrop:

Managing a big class of students has always been a challenge before the Indian educators: both at school and college level. The problem possibly is more at HEIs as we often see a teacher addressing more than hundred students in a not very comfortable classroom with faulty or no microphone. The attention span usually follows bell curve with small group of interested and quite a few disengaged: physically present but mentally not involved; the class can also contain some slow learners. Addressing such a diverse group of heterogeneous and substantial number of students always poses a serious academic challenge before many educators. One way is to ignore the disinterested and continue with the genuinely interested ones: that is an easy solution. The other approach could be to take along as many students as possible. This indeed is a challenging task. An experienced and well-accepted teacher will have less problems compared to a newcomer and inexperienced teacher. The fact, however, remains that such a situation often exists particularly at undergraduate level and a teacher has to be mentally ready for such a situation.

Some Strategies That Can Be Adopted:

While there cannot be any universal strategy and it all depends on the teacher as well as the audience, some experiments that have succeeded at many places include the following:

Create a Family Bonding: This is crucial for any size of cohort. But it becomes vital for a large size of audience. If you need to connect, you need to create bonding first as the teacher-student relationship is just not for a day but for the whole subject and may be beyond that. The teacher should, therefore, always endeavor to create a “community feeling” with the entire class so that students feel like members of a family and therefore, want to go back to the class repeatedly. A common communication group extending beyond classrooms will help improve emotional connectivity.

Leaving No One Behind: This is vital for building a conducive academic ambience. Research shows that many students do not want to attend classes as they are not noticed and feel isolated or neglected. This “neglect feeling” is a wide-ranging cause for withdrawal syndrome for many learners from classes, either physically or mentally. And this phenomenon of non-noticing can happen more easily in a large class. It is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that no one student is left

unnoticed. Knowing the first name of the students can be one of the strategies.

Dual Teaching: This is widely prevalent strategy to tackle class management and diversity of a large class where the discussions are led by two faculty members together. The teacher-student ratio automatically improves; besides the two teachers can bring out different perspectives on the same subject. In a multi-disciplinary teaching scenario, dual teaching is an ideal solution to take care of diversity of thoughts in a large class setting.

Adopting Madras System of Education (Monitorial System): In the early 19th Century educational system, some teachers in South Indian Schools used to adopt an innovative methodology of teaching the juniors by seniors. This was subsequently adopted by the British and came the concept of “peer teaching”. Under this methodology, the students learn from their colleagues or seniors; it is a powerful way of knowledge / skills transfer as students learning from their own colleagues has a tremendous impact. In a large class set up, peer teaching can become a handy tool.

Innovative Techniques of Teaching: Simple lecture methods for a large class for an extended period of time may not work at all. Therefore, duration of pure teaching should be restricted to say not more than 8 to 10 minutes at a time followed by activities or questions & answers and again theoretical discussions so on. In case group activities are part of the teaching pedagogy, partners for each activity should be changed so that many students get acquainted with each other. In a specific activity, some students can take part and others can become observers. Marks can be assigned on the quality of questions asked or the good questions asked can be appreciated. If someone is not speaking for a long time, the teacher should persuade him / her to take part. The teacher in the large setting should always be on the move and see that maximum number of students get opportunity to gain experience and participate. There should be quizzes at regular intervals. Attendance in the class in time should carry a positive stroke. All these and many more innovative teaching innovations can only make a large class happy and engaged.

Challenges and Safeguards:

Engaging a large heterogeneous class is always difficult. The challenges are more for a relatively new teacher. Some smart students may try to grab more attention; some will be physically present but mentally absent while some others will try to make confusion and chaos. Balancing act, therefore, on part of a teacher becomes extremely important. But a teacher with strong content, clarity of communication, adequate class management strategies and an objective & honest intention, the challenges can be overcome. It might take some time to build the rapport; earlier the connection is built up, smoother will be conduct of classes. A new teacher should, therefore, try to learn the tricks of the game as early as possible.

Moving Ahead:

The teachers are at the fulcrum of any change in education. Teachers should not only be adequately qualified, but their number should also be adequate and well paid. Then only any transformation in educational system is possible. NEP 2020 has realized this concern of increasing number of teachers and has recommended for teacher-student ratio even at schools at 30:1; that is a good number. However, the implementation is yet to take place. Let us hope the situation will improve as we go along. Till that time, let us all be ready with strategies to handle a large class.
