

BACKGROUND NOTES

AN APPLIED LEARNING PEDAGOGY

Indian secondary education years are high stakes, with students facing public examinations and outcomes that shape opportunities beyond school. Teachers are often expected to focus on pedagogical practices that emphasise performance in tests and exams. This commonly involves a strong focus on textbooks and practice for written assessments (Kumar, 2017).

Meanwhile, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 emphasise the importance of application in learning and the need for active pedagogies that establish connections with learners' context. It can be challenging to navigate between these two sets of expectations, especially when you are under intense time and workload pressures (Kulal et al, 2024).

An applied learning pedagogy incorporates evidence-based teaching practices currently recommended across all school settings. These include:

- communicating clear learning objectives
- building on students' existing knowledge
- 'chunking' new knowledge to manage cognitive load - breaking large amounts of complex information into smaller, meaningful, manageable 'chunks' or groups
- scaffolding - providing temporary support to help students learn a new skill, with the support gradually removed as the student becomes more proficient
- modelling practice - demonstrating skills, concepts, or thought processes for students to observe, understand, and then replicate - and
- offering regular, targeted and useful feedback to students

There are many existing resources and guides for the above general dimensions of effective pedagogy (see, for example, CBSE Teachers' resources and AERO Practice Guides).

This Toolkit element focuses on specific aspects of teaching that will help you build stronger links between the classroom and the world beyond. Applied learning involves a conscious, intentional pedagogical cycle. Preparation and planning, doing, experiencing, reflecting, receiving and giving feedback, assessing, reviewing and improving are all part of a continuous process.

The primary concern in applied learning pedagogy is to develop learners' competencies. The task or job—the 'doing'—is an important, but secondary concern. The main focus for you as a teacher is on the *transformation of the students themselves*, through the learning experience.



A STUDENT-CENTRED PEDAGOGY

An applied learning pedagogy requires you to be sensitive and responsive to your learners, their needs and contexts. Teacher-student relationships are crucial in any educational context, but are especially important in applied learning (Quin 2017, Kincade et al 2020).

Applied learning is centred on equipping students for life in the world outside. Students are complex human beings with lives and concerns beyond the classroom. Applied learning creates opportunities for students to consider and test out the usefulness of what they are studying, to see the connections with other parts of their life and their imagined futures. When you open up a space for exploring and strengthening the relevance of school studies, you can build stronger relationships with your students.

If you know something about each of your students beyond their last assessments or reports, you can guide their learning with greater insight and confidence. Assessment results or reports are useful when considering past subject-specific achievements, but usually provide minimal information about the multifaceted personalities of students.

See resource 3.1.

FOSTERING STUDENTS' AGENCY AND AUTONOMY

Conventionally, students are socialised to listen and to do as instructed. They may focus on the outcome of an assessment and have limited understanding of the significance of tasks, or of their own capacity. Learning happens to them.

When we encourage learners to take more responsibility for what they do and what they learn, they begin to perceive themselves as capable of achieving things in the world. Increased self-efficacy and a strong sense of identity prepares young people for the complexities of the world of work and life beyond school (Lee et al., 2026).

As their teacher, you can actively support your students on this journey towards autonomy. To build your students' agency in the learning process, see resource 3.2.

COMMUNITY AND WORK AS PEDAGOGICAL SITES AND RESOURCES

An applied learning pedagogy extends sites of learning to places outside the school, transporting learners and the learning process into the community and into workplaces.

It also brings the community, workplaces and people *into* the school, as teachers and as objects or subjects of learning.

Why emphasise work-related applications of learning?

- Work makes relevance of learning more visible to students from the start. If they have no idea why something needs to be learnt, they can lose interest and motivation to persist.
- Instead of being the primary focus of the class, textbooks become supplements for learners to draw on.
- The focus on workplace and out-of-school contexts highlights the competencies and dispositions that students need to develop, and their ability to use the concepts they are learning about.

Students are mostly learning in peer groups and relating primarily to the teacher. If you can take students out of the classroom into workplaces or community settings, you help them recognise that:

- Work and learning take place together, akin to apprenticeship situations where the novice learner is engaged alongside advanced learners and experts/masters and the learning process is multimodal.
- Diverse social interactions take place. For example, interacting with clients or customers, suppliers, superiors or with peers all evoke different perspectives on the quality of one's growing competence and learning.
- Learning takes place in relation to the materials and technologies that need to be handled and the tools which need to be used.
 - » These are dynamic and continue evolving. Being in touch with the world of work keeps learners and the learning process responsive to changes and new developments. It builds students' capacity to adapt and cope with change.
- Cognitive and affective development go hand-in-hand.

See resource 3.3.

STUDENT REFLECTION

Reflection is increasingly seen as an essential professional skill and your students will benefit from practising this skill to prepare for their future working life.

Your own profession asks you to be a reflective practitioner. By reflecting regularly on your own experiences in (and beyond) the classroom, stopping to consider what worked, what didn't, what surprised you, what you could change next time, you make space for improvement in your practice (Machost and Stains 2023; Ash et al., 2009).

You can model reflective practice in the classroom, articulating your thinking processes out loud. This can be a deliberate, planned strategy or occur more spontaneously when it becomes a habit.

By assessing unusual or challenging situations or questions you and your students face, and talking through how you might move through them constructively, your students hear you *doing* reflection. If you have already demonstrated what it looks like, and have named it as reflection, it will seem more natural that you should then ask them to do the same in the course of their learning (Brookfield et al., 2024).

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

- helps students analyse and refine their process for building new skills and knowledge;
- gives students practice in communicating their experiences, thoughts and feelings to others;
- can improve their wellbeing and relationships with others;
- prepares them for workplaces and communities where the capacity for self-reflection and interpersonal communication are highly valued.

See 3.7 and 3.8.