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# Globalising India needs 'schools of tomorrow': Harvard education professor

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*Wanderlust this winter*



NEW DELHI: As India moves ahead on the path of globalisation, it also needs to overhaul its education system to meet the demands of the coming age, says Harvard Graduate School of Education professor David Perkins who believes that "schools of tomorrow" should move towards teaching "knowledge that matters".

"I am broadly familiar with educational practices in several parts of the world. To my way of thinking, one of the greatest challenges of education today is fashioning a system that truly speaks to the people live and gives the skills and insights people need in our complex globalised era," Perkins told IANS in an e-mail interview.

Perkins said education in India needs to move away from mere rote learning and embrace an application-based approach through "schools of tomorrow".

So what exactly are "schools of tomorrow"?

"My personal sense of the schools of tomorrow is that they will teach knowledge that matters, that connects meaningfully with the lives learners are likely to live," he said.

With a population of over one billion, reach is still the biggest challenge for Indian education, say experts. Though the percentage of children going to school reached 83 percent in 2007, according to some sample surveys, quality remains a problem, with rampant teacher absenteeism and under-qualification of teachers being major issues.

Perkins -- the author of several books, the latest being "Making Learning Whole" -- emphasised on a comprehensive approach towards education.

"We need to be aware of the tendency in education to break ideas and skills into small elements and teach them, hoping that it all comes together later. I like to call this the disease of 'elementitis' in education," said Perkins.

"For instance, we need to teach ordinary arithmetic as a form of mathematical modelling, which it is, not just as a bundle of skills. We need to teach history, even in the early years, as an interpretive process that involves consideration of evidence and alternatives," he said.

There has been debate in India and other parts of the world on changes needed in the education system. The Indian education system, based on the British system, is one of the largest in the world.

After the enforcement of the Right to Education Act, the government is in the process of standardising the system.

However, Perkins said the present system was not enough to meet the needs of the students.

"Does what we teach and the way we teach it enlighten learners about major themes such as ecological problems and economic complexities? Does it empower learners as workers, citizens, and family members? Does it cultivate responsibility?" he asked.

"All too often, no! A great deal of what is typically taught beyond basic literacy and numeracy will never play a significant role again in learners' lives. It's just there for the test, not usable knowledge," he said.

Perkins is co-founder of Project Zero, a research programme inquiring about the psychology and philosophy of education at Harvard.

Discussing Project Zero, the academician said it was a mission to conduct basic inquiry into ideas important for learning and connect them to practical agendas "in education, formal and informal, including adult learning".

" Project Zero ideas have been applied in many settings around the world, including some settings with large numbers of relatively uneducated children. For instance, one widely used framework from Project Zero is Teaching for Understanding, an approach to teaching the disciplines in a way that fosters deep understanding. Another is Visible Thinking, a very practical model for integrating thinking skills and dispositions into the teaching of content.

"How does this apply to the Indian context? In general, Project Zero focusses on big universals of learning and their translation into practice, and our ideas apply to almost any setting where there is a concern with deep and thoughtful learning," he said.