



Counting the colours



Learning about forest animals



Teacher discussing various shapes

# Teaching with HEART

BY ABRAR HAMIM

"When I first began teaching over fifteen years ago, my world revolved around lesson plans, grading, and deadlines. I taught older students then, Classes 8 and 9, and I believed good teaching meant

strong control and perfect answers. But when I moved to younger learners, ages seven to ten, I discovered something that completely changed my understanding of education: before children can think, they must feel safe," shares Sadia Islam, a primary school teacher. Sadia's realisation is at the heart of how progressive education, often seen in English-medium schools, has reshaped our classrooms. This shift towards a student-centered learning approach is not just about new techniques; it's a direct response to the understanding that emotional safety is the bedrock of academic achievement.

## DESIGNING AN ACTIVE CLASSROOM

Teachers understand that for a

student to grow, they need an ideal environment. So, they change up the whole look of the classroom walls to introduce them to the topics they will learn throughout the year. "The decorations are tailored to be relevant to their curriculum, such as a colourful poster of the water cycle or puzzles that can be solved to make a fun poem, so that even if their eyes are wandering, their mind is always engaged with their class content," says Marufa Akter, a teacher. In fact, there is a wide contrast in the older sitting arrangements and how students sit now. Sadia says, "

sometimes teach each other. Lessons often start with a question instead of an explanation. For instance, in a science class, I might ask, "What would happen if plants could walk?" The goal is not a correct answer but to spark curiosity and confidence."

## DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKERS

Teachers use props to help students visualise their lessons. Props can include dice or coins to help students understand the depths of probability, and candies that the students are given to distribute among the other students in every possible way to teach them



Students demonstrating project

My classroom today doesn't look like the ones I grew up in. Instead of neat rows, we sit in clusters or circles, so every child feels part of the discussion.

I speak for about half the period and the rest belongs to them. They ask, argue, build stories, and

multiple factors. For experiments that are too difficult to conduct in classes, teachers use educational videos to show the students how the concepts work. Teachers also hold a recap session, where students summarise what they learnt so that teachers have a clear understanding of their students' understanding. To foster critical thinking, teachers act according to what grade the students are in. As Marufa quotes, "When I'm teaching Maths to Class 3 students, the pupils are only encouraged to talk when they have questions, when the teacher is asking a question or when they are doing group discussions so that the rest of the time there are minimal distractions for the children who are trying to calculate something or solving maths whereas when I am in class 7 teaching Science, students volunteer answers and guesses almost every two to five minutes and the teacher can assess their critical thinking and reasoning skills." A similar scenario reflects as Sadia shares her experience in classroom, "Critical thinking grows through play and imagination. We do activities like 'rewrite the ending' of a story or 'build a town' with paper and glue while discussing rules and fairness. I measure progress through their reasoning, how they explain choices, rather than just grades."

## HELPING THE STRUGGLERS

Teachers identify the struggling students in their classroom and divide them into categories, which include the academic strugglers, attention-deficient students and emotionally distressed students. The teachers first observe and try to identify which category a certain student falls into with respect to their struggles, and then the teachers cater for the students accordingly. According to Sadia, "No two students learn the same way. Some need movement; others need silence. I often give task choices: draw, write, or act out a response. Homework may vary, a poster for one, a paragraph for another, but the goal remains as

shared understanding." Further they can help students as counsellors, providing guidance and support through which they can overcome their struggles. The teachers pair up the weak students with comparatively quick learners, so that the latter can help their weak peers in their studies. These activities grow teamwork and deep friendships from a very small age among the students.

## CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Teachers always stay aware of the emotions of their students and remind them that feeling emotions such as anger or sadness is completely fine, but no one should ever hurt or harm anyone because of those feelings. When asked Marufa, how the teachers can monitor students on their emotions, she replies, "In tiffin period monitoring of classes, when every teacher who had a class before tiffin break is required to stay in that class during tiffin and observe how students are behaving and interacting with each other. Throughout that time, the teachers shared some valuable lessons as well as moral and ethical reminders to students."

When any noticeable behaviour is observed the teacher should counsel the student gently in an indirect manner. If the behaviour persists, teachers sit with the parents and discuss that particular case, find sources of unmet needs, and ways to help or improve them. For Sadia this became especially important when she had a student on the autism spectrum. Some days, the student would shout



Students participating in a science project

or break things. It frightened his classmates at first. She says, "We learned to pause instead of punish, to find the trigger, calm him, and explain what happened later. Sometimes parents were called; other times, we simply talked it out as a group. The children learned empathy; he learned trust. And I learned patience in new dimensions."

A modern teacher's role is less about delivering perfect answers and more about cultivating a supportive community. Their primary job is to create a safe space where students have the confidence to think critically, make mistakes, and learn from each other. In such an environment, mistakes are reframed. They are not seen as failures to be ashamed of, but as essential opportunities for growth and discovery. When students are free from the fear of being wrong, they gain the courage to take intellectual risks. This is the very essence of critical thinking.

Sadia Islam is a primary school teacher at Southbreeze School and Marufa Akter is a teacher at Tahfiz International School

