

## A horrifying learning loss, and how we can help our children

: 8/12/2021



Himachal: Now, schools (residential/partially residential) can reopen adhering to COVID appropriate behaviour.

*4 min read* . Updated: 13 Aug 2021, 01:39 AM IST **Anurag Behar**( with inputs from Deutsche Welle )

Too many children have suffered too large an educational deficit and recovery work must now begin

Schools must be opened, but with care, as I argued in my last column. A few upper-middle class parents were outraged by my arguing for this without having all children vaccinated first. Let's ignore their ignoring of all the scientific evidence and operational experience that schools can be opened without higher material risk of covid spreading or seriously affecting unvaccinated kids. Let's also ignore the choices the well-off have for education at home. But how can we ignore the suffering and crisis of the vast majority of India's 240 million children?

Only the children of the privileged have had any semblance of education in these past 16 months, through a combination of online classes, personal tutoring and family support. Let's assume that the educational outcomes for this group have been satisfactory—though this is a flaky assumption, given the inherent limitations of online education. But most kids have had no education since March 2020. Most of them have forgotten a lot of what they knew when schools shut, and have also been deprived of the school's mid-day meal since then, which for many would have been the day's most nutritious meal. We don't know how many of these children will not return to school, forced to work by the economic devastation of the pandemic.

Education is in a state of emergency. So, the real outrage is to not open schools—when that can be done safely. And then there is an even bigger outrage lurking in the background—the phenomenon of 'learning

loss'. Shockingly, few states seem worried by this massive educational deficit and plans appear afoot to restart schools as though it was only a minor break.

Let us absorb the enormity of over 200 million children having lost 16 months and more of their learning. We cannot ignore this and move on. Not only will it be hard for them to regain what they've lost, but much subsequent learning will be impossible. How can you learn the class 6 syllabus if you never learnt the class 5 syllabus and have forgotten what you learnt in class 4 and 3?

So, what should be done? Conceptually, it is clear and simple. Children must be taught what they have missed in the past 16 months, as also what they have forgotten. Only then can we move on. How can this be done? Let us use an illustration.

Consider class 6. After schools reopen, the teacher will have to assess where each child's learning is, across relevant capacities. Some children may be at the level of class 4, which is when schools stopped, while others would be at class 3 or even 2, on many specific capacities. For example, on multiplication and division, or, on comprehension of a page of text. The teacher will have to group the children and teach them accordingly to bring them up to a level such that the syllabus of class 6 can be started. In no class are all children exactly at the same level of learning, so one cannot expect or aim for perfection, but to reach a reasonable level on all key capacities. How can the teacher do all this effectively?

MINT PREMIUM [See All](#)



Premium

[Indian brands are big fish in a small pond](#)



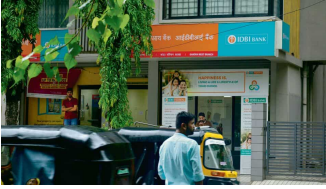
Premium

[How to identify multibagger stocks for 2022 and beyond](#)



Premium

[Mint Explainer: Can Biden bring hi-tech manufacturing b ...](#)



Premium

## IDBI privatisation is a political test for the government

First, there has to be an explicit mandate to all schools and teachers: We will not ignore the loss of the past 16 months and will bring students back to where they would have been. Second, carefully designed teaching-learning material should be made available—for example, a set of work-books which start from key capacities for class 1 and go up to class 5— that can be used in class 6, helping teachers assess the level of each child and teach accordingly. Third, and most important, adequate time to do all this.

How much time? There is no simple and clear answer for this. It could well be an entire year, and we should be willing to do that. But we could start with a six-month 'Recouping Learning Term' (RLT), if we open schools soon. If schools don't start quickly, implying much longer than 16 months of loss, then the RLT will also have to be longer.

In conjunction, the syllabus for all classes will have to be reconfigured to lighten the content load, so that after the RLT, the syllabus of the current class (class 6 in my illustration) can be completed in another 6 months or so. We will have to run with this reconfigured syllabus for a while, perhaps 2-3 years, and this could then transition to the new National Curricular Framework proposed by the National Education Policy of 2020, which in any case intends to lighten the content load and focus on genuine learning. All of this will require a massive and well-coordinated national effort. But there is no other way.

We would be playing a cruel joke on the future of over 200 million children and of our country, if we don't do everything possible to recoup lost learning. That is the real outrage.

*Anurag Behar is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation*

Catch all the [Business News](#), [Market News](#), [Breaking News](#) Events and [Latest News](#) Updates on Live Mint. Download The [Mint News App](#) to get Daily Market Updates.

[More](#) [Less](#)

Subscribe to **Mint Newsletters**

\* Enter a valid email

\* Thank you for subscribing to our newsletter.

[Post your comment](#)