

Nuts and Bolts of Education

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Recently, I bought a computer table. When the truck came to deliver, it was not the item I had seen at the store, but a flat, taped-up cardboard box. The delivery man stripped the package, found the instructions and diagram, and prepared to assemble the pieces laid out on the floor. We chatted while he settled in, and he told me which “Compre” he had gone to, but I soon had to leave him because I had other things to do.

He was long at it, though, so I went to check. I met him scratching his head. He said that he would have to go back to the store, because the package was missing some screws, and since he was late on his other deliveries, he would come back the next day to finish the job. The following day he did not turn up, so, annoyed, I called the store, only to be told that nothing was missing, because that was “how these prepackaged tables come down.” I would have to make another appointment to get the job done.

Enraged, I salvaged the instructions from the floor. And out of sheer disgust at my inconvenience, I became interested in the picture. My mind began to match things. And half an-hour later, voilà! My computer table was up.

What does this experience have to do with basic education, on which, by the way, the country has upped the ante from primary to secondary school? What are the implications for the creativity and savvy with which teachers are handling what they do? What does it say about how we are passing on bread-and-butter, survival skills to young people at the un-certificated end of secondary school?

The instruction sheet was no maze. I know, because even I could put the table up! It was in English Language, though. Simple sentences, precisely written and numbered: “Rest all four corners firmly on a solid ground. Do not tighten screws until all four panels are in place.” There were arrows and enlargements for clarification. In other words, it was a matter of linking reading to observation, process, and commonsense.

One doesn’t have to learn carpentry to assemble that kind of table. I say this because there is still a lot of patronising talk about “these children” who are in the wrong type of school—children who should be in places “doing things with their hands.”

The news is that the ball is in every teacher’s court to work within what is now basic education to educate the students that come to them. Secondary school teaching has changed, its clientele has changed, and education has changed. What is required now is not brawn work for some and brain work for others. Training in how to be creative, resourceful thinkers is the mandate for everyone living in today’s world.

The English teacher has to leave her crease. Instead of saying that some children are just not interested in her subject—that some students come to school just because their parents send them—she has to take up the challenge to examine the nuts and bolts of

English, and, with creativity and critical thinking, plan her lessons to motivate young potential dropouts who have to live in a knock-down world.

She has to show them the nuts and bolts that link all the subjects together, and how to put the areas that are being taught separately, together, creatively and meaningfully, not only for the workplace, but for life, so that they can put up their own tables in their own house.

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