



IN Focus

INDEPENDENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

A year ago, the Independence Day QEDpress (Vol 1., Issue 02) focused on **Independence in the wider Education space** in which, we had covered various aspects including - independent education systems, strategies and insights on creating independent learners in the classroom, parenting tips to identify and nurture independent children, as well as some related *Books to Read*.

In this issue, we explore the concept of **independence in the Education workplace**. When the notion of 'independence' is held *central to* an institute's *ethos* and *fostered*, it promotes confidence, builds self-esteem and provides self-motivation. Across the hierarchy, staff members who enjoy the *autonomy* to achieve their objectives with *flexibility*, are more productive, motivated, engaged and passionate about their work.

Being *independent* doesn't mean that we never have to work with others or that we should never seek other's help. It means that we take responsibility and control of our actions & decisions whilst considering those around us.

We must also realise that being *independent* doesn't just cover one's work and projects, it covers *how one takes responsibility in many other ways too*. It means, one is able to:

- take other people's ideas on board but make up one's own mind;
- when one sees others taking actions that one knows aren't okay, one doesn't just follow suit – one knows one's own mind and one has the grit to stick by it!

Read further on this topic from our team, others' insights and more.

RELATED TERMS

AUTONOMOUS WORK STYLE

This style involves leaders setting broad goals & deadlines for their team, but allowing the juniors to create a plan to achieve these objectives *independently*. This work style gives individuals a sense of *accountability*, thus increasing *motivation*.

SANS-SUPERVISION

The ability to to work *efficiently* on assigned tasks *by one's self*, with *little assistance*. Such people might get minimal guidelines / instructions from their senior colleagues, but are generally able to work with *independently without intervention*.

SELF-DETERMINED

The ability to make a decision for oneself *without influence from outside*. Self-determined people have more positive careers, risk appetite, independent living outcomes & report a higher quality of life.

SELF-RELIANT

The ability to do things and make decisions by one's self, without needing other people to help one. Self-reliant people exhibit 3 characteristic R-traits - *resourcefulness, reliability* and *resilience*.

“ A man is not independent unless he has the courage to stand alone.
- Halldor Laxness

“It is important to know we can celebrate our independence, but more so to ensure we are not living (or working) in-dependence.”

— Ervin Welsh

QED Talk

From the QEDRAK catalysts!

MS. BHAVNA TANDON

Founder & Trainer

QEDRAK

Quintessential EDucational Resources And Knowledgeware



■ **As an Educator first, later a School Head, then a Director and finally, as the Founder of an ed-tech initiative, what in your view is the importance of independence in the workplace?**

As we enter the 77th year of independence of the largest democracy, I wonder if we truly are independent. At times, it bothers me to no end how trapped individuals feel in most of the institutions and organisations that lack the true spirit of freedom. For me, the freedom or the ability, power or right to act, say or think whatever one wants, without being constrained or controlled must also extend into the work place. It gives autonomy to an individual in making decisions, being accountable and responsible, and self-reliant towards meeting daily goals for completion of projects/tasks. Time and again we have seen that the individuals who are given the autonomy to attain their objectives with a flexible approach have been found to be more innovative, creative, productive and motivated towards their work.

A perfect example is the 20-80 rule Google introduced for its employees, which earned it the label of “...happiest, most productive workplace in the world”. Google employees spend 80% of their time on core projects and 20% of their time on activities which peak their interests. Most of the innovation happens in that 20% because employees have the freedom to choose ‘What to work on’ and ‘How to work on it’, without having to deal with micromanagement. *Google News, AdSense, Gmail* are a product of that “Innovation Time Off” (ITO) policy. Nowadays modern workplaces no longer follow the traditional hierarchy-driven, directorial and rigid culture. They are more open, flexible and progressive for the greater good, and that is why *workplace independence* in my view is crucial to any individual’s as well as organisation’s success.

■ **Can independence in workplaces be ‘taught’? Or is it an innate talent in some people.**

Although there is merit in a structured framework from the operations perspective, I strongly believe that structured framework can sometimes limit the extent of an individual’s independence. However, education spaces do have a degree of *autonomy* and room for *creativity* within this framework. I guess, *effective teachers* find ways to infuse their expertise, passion, and creativity into their teaching learning practices that positively impacts their students’ learning outcomes and overall educational experience. They adapt, innovate, and tailor their approaches to meet the unique needs of their students while adhering to the educational goals. In this sense, they can exercise a significant degree of autonomy fostering a dynamic and enriching learning atmosphere.

■ **In Education, to what degree are teachers ‘truly’ independent - given that they have structured syllabi, fixed periods, pre-set assessments and more or less a packed pre-designed annual calendar?**

Independence is indeed a heavy-duty term when it comes to the workplace. The idea is to *take ownership of the work*, be your own boss, take decisions with measured risks and aim for success. In my opinion, it is a *combination of both* - innate qualities and learned skills. While some individuals might naturally be gifted with certain traits that make them inclined towards independence; comprising *self-motivation, proactive mindset, confidence, risk-taking ability, being responsible*; independence can also be developed and enhanced through constant learning, training, practice and guidance. *People who are creative in a productive sense need to have developed the capacity for independent action and a sense of self-efficacy*- Sir Ken Robinson.

■ **Please suggest some strategies on how people can build ‘independence’ in their work?**

Here are some **effective strategies** to help individuals build ‘independence’ in their work:

- **Define your goals clearly.** It will help you stay focused and take initiative to accomplish tasks independently
- **Push yourself out of your comfort zone** and taking on challenging tasks
- **Developing problem-solving skills** to address challenges and make decisions without always needing to consult others
- **Make timely decisions** - analyse options, weigh pros and cons, and make choices wisely
- **Use various tools** like calendars, to-do lists, and time-blocking techniques **to prioritize tasks, allocate time**, and meet deadlines
- **Continuously invest in your professional development.** Attend workshops and training sessions to enhance your skills and knowledge
- **View your work as if you own it.** Take responsibility for the outcomes and results of your tasks, projects, and assignments.
- **Regularly review your successes & challenges.** Identify areas where you demonstrated independence and where improvement is needed
- **Embrace change**, be open to new ideas, technologies, ways of working. **Adaptability** is a key trait for thriving in independent work spaces.



MS. ISHITA S VERMA

Director - Training & Content Development
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■ What does 'independence at work' mean to you?

As an educator (and previously as part of the corporate sector), I have always valued *independence* and autonomy as very important, 'must have' skills that everyone must develop and nurture. In fact, *independence* is a vital strength that is also in sync with my cheering the cause of *feminism*! (laughing) So, *independence per se*, is non-negotiable!

Being able to *work independently* allows a person to complete tasks on one's own. An *independent worker* has complete control of the direction and process of how to work; it allows one to focus on *what one wants* or *what one needs + how* to accomplish a task. In my experience, *working independently* allowed me time and space to reflect, think things over and concentrate on my work - setting my own goals, be creative, pace my work as mini-modules against the final deadline, choose / alter processes and methods, etc. It helped me to focus on always striving to give my best, to bring out the best! I believe this is a typical Virgo trait, and I have always strived for improving my work processes to become more efficient with 100% quality. To that end, I continue to learn - new apps, new software, new strategies or read research papers, watch videos, attend seminars....basically, I remain a *lifelong learner*. Knowledge gives power; knowledge gives confidence and naturally, independence!

■ Is all work done better if it is collective 'teamwork'? Or do you think there is value in 'independent work'?

Teamwork and *individual* (a.k.a. *independent*) work both have advantages and disadvantages that can make them better suited to some tasks over others. In many work-places, opportunities for both individual work and teamwork are typically available - just as in the *education* workspace. A teacher works independently during correction work, or framing Qs, or in the classroom while guiding the learning as it progresses. But she would have to engage in teamwork during the process of lesson or event planning. So it depends on what the task is and the time frame available to complete the task. Most schools have more than one teacher teaching a subject across the varied sections in a single grade. Project Based Learning or Multi-disciplinary Learning, allows for opportunities for teamwork and independent work to co-exist, side by side. So, it becomes necessary for the TEAM to be in sync and plan by putting their minds together to define the mini-individual modules that make up the whole. Teachers' individual insights, ideas and suggestions also have value, and find place in the larger picture - the collective educational goal. With the individual strengths and knowledge of each member, there's a wide variety of ideas that everyone can absorb-dissect-mull over-discuss-agree upon, and form something together to start something new. Having knowledge and experience of both styles of work are important and this can help a person to adapt to either, in order to give one's best.

Having said that, I think the *first knowledge* one **must have**, is to know the kind of person one is. It is worth one's while to look inward and ask one's self questions like - "What kind of a learner was I - did I study on my own or did I prefer group learning? What kind of a person am I in a workspace? Do I enjoy groupwork or do I feel I perform better when working alone? Do I like to work independently or do I need a more structured environment? Am I self-motivated or do I need regular feedback in order to make progress? Do I work best at my own pace or when prodded by others?" Answers to such questions will help one to identify one's skill set, interests, career path and motivators. These can then guide us in identifying and using the specific facets required to work independently or as part of a team.

■ It is said that in a typical job interview, HR personnel (or panelists) often ask candidates this question : "Do you prefer working alone or in a group?" Why is this asked? Don't all workspace need both styles of work? Would this apply to education as well?

(Smiling) Oh yes! that's quite a favourite one, but the general notion that it is asked to confuse the candidate or rattle the person is unfounded. Actually, recruiters want to know YOU. In your replies to the varied questions, they look for 3 aspects - *self awareness*, *self-motivation*, *self-regulation*. Meaning, your knowledge and understanding of yourself, your ability to identify effective methods of getting yourself to move from thought to action, and your ability to affect personal and professional growth based on your self-awareness and motivation; 3 key aspects for *independence at a work place*. And yes, I feel all workspaces need both style of work. As I said earlier, there are many opportunities for teamwork and independent work to co-exist in the education space - not just for teachers, but for leaders, school staff, as well as students.

■ Tell us about a time when your senior handed you a task and gave you little or no direction. What was that like for you?

Oh boy, there were many! But as I recall, there was this time when I was asked to prepare curricular study material for schools for Basics in Computing. This was way back in the 1980s, when Computer Literacy had just started in the schools. I liked penning down thoughts casually

READ TO SUCCEED

FOR SCHOOL HEADS & COORDINATORS

WORK LIFE FUSION: A Guide to Freedom and Autonomy at Work

- by **Donna L. Haeger, Eilysh Haeger**

With three generations making up the majority of the workforce, relationships with colleagues of different ages can often be tense, frustrating, or just plain confusing. This quick and informative read is designed to help people better understand each other so they can experience successful interactions at work. In addition, insight is offered to employers and level heads that can help with the development of policies related to technology use in the workplace. Based on several research studies conducted by *Donna L. Haeger*, it explores the current shift toward work-life fusion.



FOR TEACHERS

How to Create Autonomous Learners: Teaching Metacognitive, Self- regulatory and Study Skills - a Practitioner's Guide

- by **Taryn Moir**

To achieve their full potential, it is essential that children develop skills to become autonomous learners, yet this skill does not come naturally to many learners. This book is a practical teaching and planning guide to the theory, practice and the implementation of evidence-based approaches to develop essential metacognitive and self-study skills. It explains how to get students, parents and partners on board and how to implement these ideas across a class, school, or consortium.

and okay, I did win some laurels for literary and oratory pursuits in school and college. But writing a textbook? That was new, huge and scary. I had never written a book or textbook before, and when I sought my reporting head's advice on how I was to begin, she just replied - "You'll figure it out. I leave it to you; show me the outline in two days." Talk about *full* autonomy in the workspace!

A common barrier to action is often the perception that a task is *too large* or *too complex* to accomplish. So, I went back to reflecting upon my own learning style, my study method - by which, I used to break down syllabus revision into several smaller, more "doable" tasks for each day, with visual mind-maps to connect the related facts and information. I also envisioned accomplishing the revision modules in a set time period. So I used the same strategy and created this graphics-supported text outline with topics, sub-topics and pointers, as well as a sort of flow of how the learning should progress, and what each sub-topic's key take-aways should be; nowadays in schools we call them "Learning Objectives." This I did independently. But I needed feedback. So, I went with it to my colleagues, my family members, even my nieces and nephews in school. Their inputs and suggestions found place in my final plan which was delivered to my head. She then took it to the other authors on the team and her superior for approval. So you see, this whole project had a mix of both styles of work. I did eventually write many good textbooks!

There were many such instances during the 35+ yrs of my work life, and each one has shaped me into becoming more self-aware, self-motivated, confident and independent. It stems from the inner core belief of - *I CAN!* A *timeless* positive mindset.

QED Feed

A TEACHER'S ROLE during Independent Student Work

The essence of the terms *Independent Student Work* or *Independent Learning* is interpreted differently by different people. Some envision them as:

- *Independent learning means students on laptops.* But when integrated with a holistic individualised learning model that includes multiple learning modalities, it is (or can be) *much more than that!* Independent learning enables differentiation, reinforces skill fluency, and promotes a level of student agency that builds habits for lifelong success. Perhaps the most compelling *WHY* for independent learning to find place in current classrooms is that it allows *time for students to process new information & experiences.* They get *time to think, reflect, connect, apply.*
- *Independent learning reduces the role of a teacher.* Far from it! A truly successful implementation of the **independent learning model** is **the most challenging kind of teaching in a personalized learning model.** Students enjoy being individually immersed in a *unique self-paced journey of learning*, but they're still part of a larger learning world. The teacher's responsibility is to *balance learning spaces & opportunities*, while making sure that *each child has a smooth trip* (learning process) and arrives at the *right destination* (desired learning objectives).

Our flights to many QEDRAK training venues made me think of the process of *Independent Learning* as a *plane journey*. The teacher's role ranges from *travel agent* (planner) to *scheduler* (setting the time-table for learning experiences) to *pilot* (steering the learning through inquiry, not lecture) and *air-hostess* (the on-demand help & nourishment resource). There is enough anecdotal evidence shared by teacher-educators regarding their **diminished ability** to think and plan creatively, engage in intellectual risk-taking, independently solve problems, research on real-world learning approaches & cross-disciplinary teaching practices, even foster creativity in their own students.



The key element of engagement is trust; building trust requires (institutions) to provide (staff) with as much autonomy and flexibility as possible.

– from Matt Charney 's quote

The main reasons / challenges being, *availability of time + absence of autonomy / independence in the work place.*

Going back to the analogy I drew with the flight journey, just as there are checklists to help airline crew to prepare their aircraft for a safe flight; in the same way, teacher teams have *specific planning tasks ahead of each independent learning session.* Topping the list should be their *authentic understanding of each student's readiness level* for the knowledge, skills and competencies they'll be working on. This information is very important at the outset, not only because it helps teachers determine a *schedule for what each student will be doing that day;* it also helps teachers to know *which students need extra attention* and plan *check-ins* accordingly.

Taking a good tip from the plane journey - on an aircraft, the head captain & pilot greet passenger, get them seated, assist with carry-on luggage, and repeat safety instructions. In the same way, we must remember that as students *transition to independent learning,* teachers should *use the first five minutes to reinforce routines.* Similarly in a classroom, teachers greet students, help them find their seats, and assist with equipment--coursebooks, notebooks, learning aids, even laptops, so that students have the right materials and know what to do with them. This initial greeting (which covers rules for movement, voice level, what to do) is very important as it provides students with clear directions and expectations.

Teachers must also give students a "warning" to let them know *when check-ins begin.* ("I'm going to start coming around to check in with you in five minutes.") This creates some accountability, focus and clear expectations about the *what* and *how* of their task on hand.

Now the flight is in the air - the *learning process* has started! Imagine what people do on a flight when the seat-belt sign is turned off - some write emails, read different types of newspapers, magazines, kindle or books, watch videos, play games, or listen to podcasts. (*In this analogy, let's assume that sleeping is NOT an option!*) In the classroom, there is even *more differentiation during independent learning,* and teachers need to know what each of their students are working on. Some might be taking a virtual lesson to introduce them to a new skill or concept. Others might be playing an online game to review material they've already learned about. Others may be engaged in more traditional assignments with printed materials or looking through library references. The skills, lessons, and pedagogical methods could be differentiated for every student.

To make your *check-ins* more purposeful, *teachers need to ask the right questions.* Vague, unspecific questions would get one-word responses: Questions like - "How are you doing?" "Need anything?" "Are you doing okay?" "Got it?" etc. - would prompt a YES or a NO reply, which actually does not help the teacher to understand where a student is at. Instead, teachers must develop the skills to ask the right questions, observe keenly, guide their interactions with prompts tailored to a student's skill-level and understanding of the material.

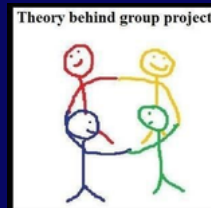
Finally, the day's journey is almost over. The *flight of learning is about to land.* How should teachers prepare for "arrival"? Teachers should have a *consistent system for the final minutes of each independent learning session.* It should include *procedures for winding down* to task completion, collecting one's material and one's thoughts, as well as *collating one's doubts and queries.* The preparation for touch down must include group reflection, turning in learning aids-tools-gadgets, and transitions. As with small group teamwork, a teacher's role during independent learning may look different from what we traditionally imagine. But the TEACHER is essential to creating an environment where students are prepared to navigate a safe and successful journey on their own. To achieve this, *a teacher must enjoy independence and autonomy* to guide the learning that is directed at developing the same skills she wishes to enjoy - *independence while working!* ***

The **September 2023 Teachers Day Special QEDpress** has the theme - **The New-Age Educator.**
Please send your contributions - an effective classroom strategy / class humour / vocab word / a featured article / book titles, etc. related to the theme to - team@qedrak.com

RIB TICKLERS



"Whew! That was close!
We almost decided something!"



TEAMWORK

25% credit, 100% work



"Teamwork is essential –
it allows you to blame someone else."



"Let's not confuse hard-working,
independent woman as SINGLE."



"It takes less time to do a thing right,
than it does to explain why you did it
wrong." - H W Longfellow



"Experience is what you get when you
didn't get what you wanted."

The Tonsbridge School, Dehradun



TEACHER TRAINING

Nestling in a picturesque part of the Doon Valley, in the foothills of the Himalayas, stands the tall and impressive edifice of **The Tonsbridge School**. That was the setting of some hectic but immensely enjoyable **two full-day CPD training sessions** with the Tonsbridge educators.

The workshop titled "**BLend d'A-R-T-S & more**" spanned the entire breadth of grade-levels; (Early Primary till Grade 12), and was conducted *simultaneously* for two groups, across 2 venues :

Group 1 : for Primary school till Grade 5

Group 2 : for Middle school till Grade 12

The photo-journey on the left, are memories from those two intense days that we enjoyed with the eager, curious and interactive teachers from Tonsbridge.

DAY 1 :

GRP 1: *Implementing NEP 2020 for the FNDL & PREP levels, with focus on Integration; concept of theme-based planning with multi-disciplinary approach.*

GRP 2: *NEP 2020 focus on Integration; the importance of the ARTs; exploring Language Arts, Visual Arts, Rhythm Arts (dance+music) & Theatre.*

DAY 2 :

GRP 1: *Hands-on activity, presentation, feedback and reflection.*

GRP 2: *Hands-on activity, presentation, feedback and reflection. Exploring integration of Sports, Storytelling, AI, Health & Fitness, GCE & SDG, 21st century skills.*

Across both days,

On site workshops as the one held at *The Tonsbridge School* (as well as at various other schools we have visited), are far more effective in translating the learning from teacher training into the classroom. Team QEDRAK's presentations with ample examples, backed by hands on DIY practice, presentations with peer appraisal, discussions with varied insights, all-in-all fostered a deeper understanding, thereby building confidence among the educators.

Our heartfelt gratitude to the Management, Principal, Dean, Coordinators & Educators of **The Tonsbridge School** for this opportunity, support, impeccable hospitality and arrangements. We look forward to many more stimulating sessions. ***

General Electric Hydro, Maneja Vadodara



“...effective communication requires more than an exchange of information. When done right, communication fosters understanding, strengthens relationships, improves teamwork and builds trust.

Pathshala School & Hostel Lasundhara



Overview
At the end of this session you will know about:

- What is Story-telling (ST)?
- What History and NEP 2020 say about Storytelling and its place in the classroom
- Elements of a Story
- Story genres; How to choose stories
- How to tell a Story vs how to tell a GOOD Story
- Stories in the Curriculum
- In the context of Competency based education
- Crafting original stories – your own story, students stories
- ACTIVITY - Creating your lesson plan with ST

STORYTELLING - a social and cultural activity of sharing stories, at times with improvisation, theatrics or embellishment. Every culture has its own stories or shared as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation or instilling moral values.

TEACHER TRAINING

The term - *lifelong learning* is applicable not only to the education space but extends into the corporate working environment. Among the training modules typically covered there, the most prominent ones are *Technical training* and **Soft-skills training**.

It is popularly said that "IQ gets you hired; EQ gets you promoted." **Soft Skills Training** combines a variety of interpersonal, communication as well as **socio-emotional skills**, that help people to interact effectively with others in the work place, thereby enhancing productivity and providing a conducive work environment. Initially, soft skills training in India was conducted for front line and middle management, based on the assumption that senior level executives are already adept at it. The workspaces today are very different - C level executives need to *manage business areas, be team-oriented, multitask continually, lead without rank, resist stress while ensuring subordinates do not suffer burnout, AND make real time contributions to the CEO for major decisions, anytime anywhere.*

Recognizing this, **GE Hydro invited Team QEDRAK** to conduct an on-site interactive workshop on Communication. The session was titled - "*Clear Communication Leads to Clear results*".

The workshop began with the basics and need for communication, progressing into the types of communication, verbal & non verbal, elements, flow of communication across hierarchical levels, barriers and biases, etiquette, challenges etc. Games & activities made the session enjoyable, easy and fun.

Our journey with Continuing Professional Development at the *Pathshala School* is not new. As part of our social responsibility, we enjoy conducting honorary workshops to elevate the knowledge, skills, competencies of the Pathshala Teachers and Students.

In June 2023, Team QEDRAK conducted an on-site training (with activities) on the topic - **Story Telling as a Pedagogy in the Classroom**. Pursuant to the focus Storytelling has received in the NEP 2020 and subsequently in the 2 NCFs, many educational institutions are looking at empowering their teachers with this effective tool to foster deeper, more meaningful and contextual learning.



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ENRICH



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