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TEACHING THE 'NET GENERATION': A PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation has brought in its wake multi-dimensional changes in all sectors, including the educational sector too. From the times when education was thought to bring in refinement in human lives to the present expectations of churning out global citizens with global competence and skills, there is a paradigm shift in the very perception of purpose of education. With the advancement of information and technology, the role of the teacher from being the fountainhead of knowledge has to be reduced to that of a facilitator. With rampant digitalization, there is a dire need to cater to the needs of homo sapiens today. It is in this backdrop that the present paper is an attempt to map the changes that are to be speedily incorporated in order to make the present education relevant, purposive and meaningful to all the stakeholders involved.

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INTRODUCTION

With the advent of rapid technological advancement in the present century, it is but a pressing need to rethink about what is to be taught and how it needs to be transacted. The corpus content as well as the pedagogy in the education system is in a most dynamic state because of the changing needs of the stakeholders. The ancient education system in India was considered modular to the world, because the objectives were clear. Education was meant to shape the overall personalities of the wards, infusing them with capacities to lead a value based life. It focused on acquisition of knowledge and values and was divorced from gaining employment. The three steps of learning were 'Shravana' where the student listened to the teachers discourse; 'Manana' meaning the student internalized his comprehension of the lessons and 'Nidhyasana' to live the truths that he learnt by incorporating them in his life. It did

not matter what employment the student took, as employment was hereditary and only developing abilities to lead purposive and meaningful lives was the major goal of education. But today from the glorious days of Takshashila, Nalanda the sought after educational destinations of the entire world, we have trickled down to a disappointing position of not finding a single University in the list of 100 best educational institutions in the world. The major reason for this is the colonial accident, and the disastrous implementation of Macaulay's minutes to enslave Indians, to keep them Indian by blood but English by taste and opinion. Unfortunately this colonial education system has continued with not much change and its effects are that original thinking and analytical skills fail to be developed among today's youth. Added to this colonial hangover the technological advancement has made youth over dependent on it for everything including

educational purposes. So the question is where do we go from here?

We cannot go back to our ancient educational practices as we have traversed into the global arena, where digitalization is a glaring truth. We cannot afford to keep out the technological interference from educational field. With our Hon'ble Prime minister Shri. Narendra Modiji talking about 'Digital India', we need to use technology as a tool to impart education so that the students' attraction towards gadgets like mobiles, ipods, laptops are used as medium to give them the requisite knowledge in key areas and inculcate in them employability skills. It is in this perspective that this paper attempts to talk about revamping old education system to re tailor it to suit the needs of the 21st century's youth.

The Present Scenario

"With all the money that we are throwing away on humanities and art - give me that money and I will build you a better student." -----Marvin Minsky

"Without the humanities to teach us how history has succeeded or failed in directing the fruits of technology and science to the betterment of our tribe of homo sapiens, without the humanities to teach us how to frame the discussion and to properly debate the uses-and the costs-of technology, without the humanities to teach us how to safely debate how to create a more just society with our fellow man and woman, technology and science would eventually default to the ownership of-and misuse by-the most influential, the most powerful, the most feared among us." --Edwin Edwards

In the wake of Globalization, there has been a contradictory assessments of the relevance of teaching anything other than science and technical subjects. In the present century, an emphasis on the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) has not only attracted more students but more resources from the university,

government, and private sector are being garnered for its furtherance at the expense of the humanities and social sciences. This pursuit of STEM can partly be explained by its utilitarian appeal of employment, an undercurrent that has made its existence in today's societal understanding of higher education..

Additionally, we see the present generation becoming increasing dependent on technology for almost all their activities, educational and otherwise. With the ubiquitous smart phones, laptops, kindle readers, desktops, notepads, iPods and other such gadgets forming their paraphernalia, the learners today have access to the World Wide Web and the galloons of information in the multimedia format, at their finger tips. In this scenario, the text- based teaching in the class rooms appears restrictive, redundant and unattractive to the tech savvy students. This has led the teachers to rethink of making changes in the pedagogy of teaching any discipline in order to make it more relevant and attractive to students. For instance, instead of reading the novels of Jane Austen, a literature student can watch film adaption; rather than learn Wittgenstein or Aquinas, a philosophy student is taught the ethics of business; in place of the study of World War I, a history student learns about 1960s popular culture. Although all disciplines have to evolve and change over time, the incorporation of latest trends and fashions can strike one as desperate attempt to attract students at any price, and a loss of confidence about the value and relevance that used to constitute the core of one's discipline

Teachers in the Digital World

An earlier teacher conjures images of a scholar isolated in a hushed, dimly lit room, surrounded by stacks of books. But that stereotypical image no longer holds true, as in today's world of ever advancing technology and an explosion of information, the teachers very much have to engage themselves in the ongoing debate to be update and relevant and be available for meeting the learners on the virtual platform to discuss the emerging and growing trends in any discipline. The advantages of the widening and integrating virtual space provided by the digitalization, which is encashed by the techies and code writers to

exchange and share ideas and are thriving in it can offer lot of opportunities to the teachers too. This growing awareness to lever the technological tools to teach relevantly with multi- disciplinary approach is what is required today.

Only when the tech savvy students are met on an equal platform of the digital world can the teachers hold attention of the undergraduates and graduates and ready them for the outside world. Cultivation of habits of posing questions, making arguments, and developing a certain rigor in dealing within climates of diverse opinions are the new skill sets required to adapt to the changing world. Collaborative projects into the field, which requires the kinds of skills associated with teamwork, with working with diverse populations with differing expertise are the order of the day.

Teaching and Learning: A Paradigm Shift

Why should college students read narrative prose when they get their fill of stories from television, cinema, and interactive video games? Narratives currently live in many different media, and there should be nothing wrong with academics considering them alongside print narratives. Defenders of the traditional curriculum mostly believe students *need* to read these printed texts if they are to be truly educated, cultured members of our society. But twenty-first century teaching is no longer about the four walls of the classroom. There was a time when a learner of English had to rely almost solely on what went on within those walls. A really motivated learner might have been able to listen to the BBC World Service, see a film in English and, if they could afford it, buy an English newspaper or book, but the teacher's role in the students' language learning was key – they were the fount of all knowledge, the model for the students, the 'one true source' and the classroom, the sanctified space for learning.

But that was before the coming of the digital age. Now, thanks to the Internet and the advent of digital media, a shift is happening in learning and it's a time for teachers to embrace their new roles as facilitators, and to watch and help as learning moves into a new era. Teaching has always adapted to its circumstances methodologically and physically, moving from lecture to pair work and

from translation to communication, from slate to whiteboards, from hand-written postcards to authentic magazine articles, from radio recordings through to DVDs. This adaptation is necessary because we realize our students have needs and interests that run beyond the classroom. If we can spark that interest, we spark motivation. A motivated student is a better learner. And the digital age has given us the greatest opportunity yet to motivate our learners to keep them engaged in a way that most interests them and best suits the way they learn.

While we will always strive to give our students the best possible lessons, we have to accept that the amount of time they spend with us in the classroom is limited compared to the exposure they can now get in their daily lives. We cannot control this exposure, nor can we be there for every student at every moment to help them understand everything.

In the digital age of teaching, the dual role of both teacher *and educator* has never been more valid – teach students to be literate in a second language, educate them to be digitally literate so they can take control of their own learning. Teach them subjects, educate them in how to delve deeper in them for themselves and apply it to their lives.

The kids are digital, so should you be. The latest research suggests that the average number of hours teenagers are spending online is 85 per week and that their favourite search engine is no longer Google, but YouTube. In other words, information that cannot be rendered in a visual format is becoming invisible to this generation. Again, the message to educators was, 'Adapt or die – you must digitise your teaching.'

Integrating Techno-tools into Teaching: A few Samples

There are 5 billion mobile phone connections, 3 times as many mobile phones as computers on the planet. Data consumed in 2010 for mobiles 2.8 Exabyte, which is ever on the rise, social media use is on the rise with over 750 million users on Face book and 24 hours of video uploaded every minute on YouTube. With this statistics, it is an invincible challenge for today's teachers to compete with these attractions to keep their students' attention plugged to their teaching.

Instead teachers can actually channelize these attractions into learning the components required.

Mobile phones: We know that multimedia brought the world into the classroom. Now smart technologies will take the classroom out into the world. Mobiles are the natural communication tool of choice for younger users. These can be used for providing personalised learning environments, by which they can set their own learning goals, manage to achieve them at their own pace and place.

From Blackboard to Blogs: Nardi et al. (2004) states: "Blogs are well suited to serve as online personal journals for students, particularly since they normally enable uploading and linking of files"

Blogging becomes communicative and interactive when participants assume multiple roles in the writing process, as writers who write and post, as readers or reviewers who respond to other writers' posts, and as Writer-readers who, returning to their own posts, react to criticism of their own posts. Readers in turn can comment on what they read, although blogs can be placed in secured environments as well making learning interactive, contributory and interesting.

Skype: Students can communicate with experts from various countries and gain a more multi dimensional perspective of the subject at hand. They can establish links with people of same interests that can lead to productive collaborations and research.

IPODS : iPods are one of the mobile media devices which enable users to produce, organize, deliver, and use media also users can share texts, images, audio or video with their peers and teachers. The technology and pedagogy of using podcasting and iPod could be in improving learners to manage their learning with most updated learning components.

YOUTUBE: One can browse the Internet for videos on varied topics or film adaptations on you-tube or similar websites. Hundreds of such informative videos are just a click away and watching them seems to be far more captivating for students. For instance, websites such as the one hosted by the Royal Shakespeare Company represent a gold mine for English teachers who want to spice up their lessons with extracts of plays, interviews with actors and directors, etc. It would be a good idea to have the students watch an extract from a play such as

Francesca Annis's interpretation of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy in Roman Polanski's movie and follow the e-text of the play in a separate window.

Conclusion

"Understanding how networks work is one of the most important literacies of the 21st Century," aptly says Howard Rheingold. So networked learning is the need of the hour and so we should create conducive environments within which students will organise their own learning. Hence as today's generation are - 'The Net Generation' the 'Digital Natives' the ' Homo Zappiens' Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.

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