

Design for a More Dynamic 21st Century Education: Enhancing Teacher-Learner Relationship

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Abstract:

Education today is facing an ever increasing number of challenges, brought about to a great extent by technological advancement and globalisation phenomenon. The effectiveness of traditional classroom learning has been put to question with the proliferation of online learning, the increasing appeal of massive open online courses (MOOCs), and the advent of new learning tools and resources. Schools are under scrutiny from the business community, as they are accused of turning out graduates with “skills mismatch”. The multi-faceted forces operating all over have led educators and policy makers to undertake a serious review of school system, course curricula/content, pedagogies, and learning environment.

Any reform at education should take into consideration not only the learner’s assimilation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes but also how the learning process integrates and appropriates the requisite elements to achieve these goals. Indeed, within the context of lifelong learning, the essential mandate of education today is to develop lifelong learners who can survive and thrive in a global knowledge economy and have the capability to effectively and creatively apply skills and competencies to new situations in a dynamically changing world (The World Bank, 2003). To this extent, the thrust of learning endeavor, be it guided or self-directed, should be to continuously enhance the learner’s competencies in a consistent and deliberate manner.

At the core of education reform is how teachers and trainers equip themselves for 21st century engagement. What are the critical elements needed for their professional development for greater relevance and impact or undertake the needed professional development? What should be given emphasis or priority so as to make them more competent given that students learn ever more outside the classroom?

The author argues that, given a plethora of 21st century skills and for the teacher to become a more effective agent in the learning process, there is a need to move seamlessly from traditional tools of teaching to modern technology-driven ones. Accordingly, he should be able to provide learning mechanisms that challenge the learner’s ability to be creative and innovative. At the core of this issue is the teacher’s grasp of the basic principles of human behavior and the latest findings in neuroscience. Moreover, he should possess a perspective that is global in nature and can interrelate the complex factors that underpin the developments in the different sectors of society. This implies that the teacher has the intrinsic ability to analyze issues and problems from a multidisciplinary perspective and be able to arrive at integrative solutions. Finally, the teacher should be able to exercise the art of storytelling and make it as an integral part of teaching strategies.

The author makes anecdotal references to specific examples of enhanced teacher-learner relationship in the Philippines. In a city within Metro Manila, teachers train students to be more creative through weekend sessions in music and visual or applied arts, using storytelling from experienced artists as a dominant medium of knowledge sharing. The second example refers to the author’s university requiring all graduating students to go through an “immersion” program

in blighted communities for several days with teachers facilitating reflection on lessons learned and/or actions taken. Lastly, Rotary Academy in District 3830 trains and accredits trainers who go through skills enhancement program in facilitation, storytelling, social media application, and understanding human behavior-thought process.