Chapter 5
Redefining the Meaning of Learning

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ABSTRACT

An examination of the educational system during the last decade reveals that changes have gradually permeated all aspects of teaching and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the pace of change, affecting all areas of teaching and learning through most of the 2020 school year and beyond. A digital learning modality quadrant is presented to provide educators and enterprises with a tool to determine the most optimal modality that meets the need of the curriculum as well as learners. Also, this chapter introduces the quadrantal teaching and learning framework (QTLF) designed to assist in redefining the meaning of learning and, by extension, reshaping the future of learning. It outlines four areas of the educational system that must change: how we teach, how we learn, what we teach, and what we learn. This chapter endeavors to address the challenges related to these four areas and proposes strategies that could be used to prepare educational institutions to operate within a redefined meaning of learning.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally learning has been explicitly perceived as a one-dimensional concept and this rather narrow and limited understanding has for decades remained largely the dominant view and deserving of social acknowledgment and status. Learning was understood as an objective experience of knowledge acquisition, punctuated by mechanical assessments as a proof and criteria for a successful learning experience (Izak, Kostera, & Zawadzki, 2017). Factors contributing to drastic societal changes, coupled with the unprecedented crisis of COVID-19, have made apparent the grave limitations of current understanding of what learning intrinsically represented. A more holistic and multi-dimensional understanding of learning is required at a time when knowledge explosion has become normative and complexity is the new makeup of societal structure (DeLanda, 2019). One manifestation of this complexity is the many dimensions of learning that emerged in just the last decade. Burgeoning and multiplying notions and

concepts related to learning have spread rapidly such as microlearning, deep learning, shallow learning, bite-sized learning, and just-in-time learning, to name but a few. The emergence of these layers and dimensions of learning is indicative of a great need to reimagine learning and create new strategies adapted to current times. It has become imperative that higher education leaders, policy makers, content learning providers, and enterprises delivering and offering corporate training embrace a new vision of learning and adopt a renewed strategy to ensure the efficiency, quality, relevancy, and impact of their teaching and learning programs.

THE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

For decades the field of education has remained unchallenged and its value universally accepted as desirable. Rooted in traditional values, imbued with longstanding cultures, educational institutions that were ironically supposed to be the bastion of intellectualism and analytical thinking, were lacking internal mechanisms for self-evaluation, and absent from their midst were strategic tools for self-assessment (Urban, Wagoner, & Gaither, 2019). These factors were compounded with the fact that educational institutions enjoyed the benefits of granting social recognition and positive financial impact. As a result, the educational system had no compelling reason to change, with no motivation to be accountable and stay relevant. The educational system has been among the most entrenched organizational entities, relying on teaching paradigms and learning modalities that have proved overtime to be ineffective (Bok, 2013). One striking example is the long-held tradition of establishing a strong reliance on long drawn lectures as the quasi-totality vehicle to educate learners.

Among other factors, drastic societal changes, globalization, and technological advances greatly affected an educational system once highly regarded and disrupted an institution that felt too comfortable with the status quo (Lucas Jr, 2016). Higher education is at a crossroad where it must choose to adapt, innovate, reinvent itself, or become obsolete and perish. Overtime the value of a college diploma, once highly regarded, has been questioned. The educational system became plagued with systemic problems, among these were lack of relevancy to meet industry needs, job relevancy of college degrees, and a skyrocketing cost of education with students facing uncertain job prospects and massive student loans (Levin, McEwan, Belfield, Bowden, & Shand, 2017). On the positive side, several positive new shifts must be noted indicating that there is a notable movement towards embracing new pedagogical approaches.

The year 2020 has unequivocally transformed how and where people work, socialize, learn, shop, and learn. Among the transformations that took place has been the rapid adoption of digital learning, which has become the *de facto* predominant learning modality for most institutions during the year 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic left educational institutions with no other alternative but to go online as the primary delivery method for their curriculum. Just a decade ago, and with still lingering negative perceptions today, online education was frowned upon and often labeled as an inferior quality educational experience. These negative perceptions have been validated by the burgeoning of diploma mill institutions (Jordan, 2013), relying on the then-frenzy move towards obtaining non-regulated online degrees issued by non-accredited institutions. A gradual of acceptance of online learning has been the trend, with a stronger reluctance from the part of faculty to embrace this teaching modality (Allen & Seaman, 2003). Within a contextual landscape where there is a waning perception that online learning and online degrees are of a lesser quality and value compared to face-to-face education, online education is currently the fastest-growing segment of higher education, with current trends indicating that online

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