

Chapter 5

Teaching Amidst Unexpected Unknowns: The Unwritten Rules of the Game

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation, technology, migration, competition, changing markets and transnational environmental and political challenges have added a new urgency to develop the skills and knowledge needed in the 21st century. Educators, governments, foundations, employers and researchers refer to these abilities as ‘higher-order thinking skills’ ‘deeper learning outcomes’ and ‘complex thinking and communication skills’. We need to understand how students today are different from those of yesteryears. Although everyone believes that the knowledge and skills that students need today are different from what they needed yesterday, terminology differs from country to country, as does the composition of knowledge, skills and values. This chapter is broadly divided into four sections. The main objectives of the narrative are to understand the growth and evolution of teaching, to develop an understanding of the differences between the teaching of the East and that of the West, to explore teaching as an art and a skill and finally to prepare ourselves for the burgeoning demands of digital-age teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school. – Albert Einstein

Einstein had underscored the quintessential spirit of education through the aforementioned set of seemingly simple words, which have a depth of meaning stored in them. We are not what we are born as but we are what our education makes us. Over the years education and teaching have undergone myriad metamorphoses. A teacher has to perform a number of roles like resource provider, instructional spe-

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cialist, curriculum designer, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, mentor, school leader, data coach, change catalyst and, last but not the least, a learner. While playing these roles and discharging these responsibilities, the teacher has to constantly strive to be perceived as a strong pillar on which lies the entire onus of the moral and ethical development and preservation of society. Preparing students for work, citizenship and challenges of life is complicated.

In the present neutrally-networked global village, where the world map is small enough to fit into the screen of the smart phone in our palm, where there are no more geographical demarcations and where everything is influenced by everything else, keeping teaching isolated from the Brownian movement of change would be a self-defeating task. In the year 1970, futurologist Alvin Toffler had enunciated the concept of 'Future Shock' in his eponymous best-selling book. In very simple words, the concept was a pointer to a state of affairs that human society would find itself in at the turn of the century in which change would engulf human society at such a break-neck speed that it would not be able to make sense out of it (Toffler, 1970). The future shock is no longer in the future, it's already very much around us, and teaching, like any other human phenomenon, has to survive in this very 'future-shocked' state. The teaching of today cannot be like the teaching of yesterday. It has to compulsorily change in consonance with the changing demographics and psychographics of the learners. The number of variables in the teacher-taught equation has increased dramatically and there are hardly any constants remaining. The teaching task has now become an act of managing the unmanageable, of dealing with risk and uncertainty and following the unwritten rules of the game as there are hardly any written rules left. Let's try and examine these unwritten rules of the game of teaching through a journey along the historical timeline of teaching, followed by a discussion on the distinction between the Indian and Western models of teaching, the analysis of teaching in its capacity as an art and a skill, and lastly, a delineation of the learning stimuli of the digital age and the expected teaching responses.

THE TIMELINE OF TEACHING

God said: "Let there be light!" and there was light. And a tiny speck of protoplasm stirred, moved, spread its diminutive, almost invisible tentacles around, and transformed itself into the multitudinous society of human beings around us.

If one were to take a retrospective view of the evolutionary annals of the existence of the human species on the face of this planet, they would find that the 'written word' saw the light of the day much after the 'spoken word' and the 'spoken word' was born much after the 'thought word' was already there. In other words, a pre-historic preview of humankind would reveal that it all started with the 'thought', in fact, with pre-verbal thoughts, thoughts that preceded words, thoughts that were housed in the human mind but could not be verbally expressed for want of language.

That does not imply that teaching and learning did not exist then. They did, but in a very rudimentary form. It was by and large a system of self-teaching and self-learning, propelled by an innate exploratory trial-and-error mechanism.

With the gradual shifting of the sands of time came the earliest forms of 'organised' teaching and learning. Religion and religious scriptures were the oldest teachers of human society across the latitudes and longitudes of the globe. Religious evangelists, though with a different intention, contributed greatly to the establishment and consolidation of teaching systems. A plethora of missionary institutions belonging to different religious orders fanned out across the length and breadth of the world with the mandate

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