

Coronavirus crisis: An opportunity to transform teaching and learning

The education system which, for centuries, relied on classroom-based chalk and board approach to teaching is finding it difficult to stay relevant during the current crisis. As the educational institutions, country after country, are closing down due to fear of the Coronavirus infection, school administrators, teachers and education bureaucracies are looking for the alternatives to deliver learning while students remain off-campus. Some schools and higher education institutions are innovating to use new education and communication technologies, but there is a crisis at all levels of education as the archaic system that survived till date on the face to face learning is forced to transform by a virus that emerged from the back streets of Wuhan province in China. Going into the causes of Coronavirus spread is beyond the scope of this editorial, but the impact it is having on the conventional model of education and how the new technologies and approaches are sought to go outside the four walls of the classroom is very pertinent issue to all who are passionate about teaching and learning.

One cannot deny the fact that everyone is baffled by the scope and the size of the challenge that education faces today. No one was prepared for such an unprecedented challenge that questions the very rationale of classroom-based learning. Our pedagogies are increasingly becoming redundant. While this predicament remains real, it has also demonstrated that how education managers and teachers alike have been keeping their heads embedded in the sand while the world around them has been transforming at a dizzying pace. While there have been major changes in health services, media, banking, aviation, real estate, manufacturing industries, education system relied on a centuries-old model of putting students in front of teachers who would lecture them to boredom. Our over-reliance on teacher-centric education model is getting exposed and its relevance is being questioned in an age of digital disruption and innovation. Though the technology, especially communication and educational technology has made huge strides in last few decades, our education system with the classroom as the epicentre has not embraced new technologies and tools to innovate and disrupt the fossilized means and measure of developing, delivering and assessing learning.

Every crisis leads to some sort of transformation or innovation, and it looks like the education sector, after all, will benefit from the fears of coronavirus infection. It is encouraging to see many schools and universities finally waking up to the need to transform as new tools of content creation and distribution are being applied to reach to the students wherever they are. But the current change is chaotic and unplanned. A glance at different approaches used by the educational institutions demonstrates the focus is more on delivery rather than content creation. In many ways, we are still lecturing. The only difference is that instead of bringing the students into the classroom we extend the classroom to their homes. There is less interactivity and involvement of the students. To develop better interactive and participatory content, teachers need to work with educational technologists and media professionals. The students, with access to various resources and platforms, should be part of this content creation. The present crisis allows us to co-create educational content where students have ownership of what they learn. In this way, the teacher-centric model can be replaced by the student-centric learning process.

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