

Reimagining academia for students of the future

SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

"Nothing pushes students to do their best work like a professor who takes pride not in his or her own accomplishments, but in helping others realize their potential"

-- Jason Dent

RECENTLY I heard a rather bewildering story on teaching in higher education. Taught to depict a triangle as ABC, a student wrote PQR instead and suffered a significant deduction of points for "misrepresenting" a triangle! Horrifying as this isolated story - perhaps even a fable - may be, there is a growing discontent against teachers, especially on how they relate to students and the methods they employ in their classrooms.

Being curious about this vital matter of student-teacher interface, I asked fresh young recruits in a teacher-orientation workshop to recount experiences of poor or ineffective teaching from their own past. Each of them had a story to tell. Here is a sampling of what they suffered:

- Teacher does not take classes regularly and has many excuses to be busy.
- Could not make the class interactive.
- Used the traditional lecture method and taught straight from the book.
- Did not have a clear idea of either content or materials.
- Course outline of the teacher was not up-to-date.
- Not approachable or friendly.
- Laughed at us if we could not answer; as if it was our fault that we did not know the answer.
- Would never answer questions and laughed at us for being so stupid.
- Displayed [preference] towards a particular group.
- Assessment system was questionable [especially its fairness].
- Went through all the slides without explaining the subject matter.
- Lectures were disorganized; no clear expectations were set.
- Discouraged students from asking questions.
- Not available during office hours.
- The exams required rote memorization of mundane/trivial facts and writing essays.
- Rigid, not open to ideas, and lost patience when questioned.

In this day and age, fresh graduates are telling us what academia should NOT be doing. Yet, unfortunately, many of the age-old practices prevail. Left unchecked, the quality of our students will automatically be relegated to the sidelines while the creative and demanding jobs will be left to be outsourced. Not surprisingly, a recent report suggested that Bangladesh already pays out over 5 billion US dollars to foreign workers who fill the

middle to upper echelons. A large portion of our foreign exchange earnings are thus diverted from other productive ventures while our graduates languish and suffer. Is this state of affairs acceptable?

The larger questions that the above state of affairs elicits, also appropriately raised by the World Economic Forum 1, is "How do we best educate the students of tomorrow? What we teach our children - and how we teach them - will impact almost every aspect of society, from the quality of healthcare to industrial output; from technological advances to financial services" ... and much more. Two critical elements (and there are others) requiring serious attention are content and delivery.

Content (what to teach): Knowledge is not static; it has grown rather rapidly and will

selection also requires a collective conviction of all stakeholders that the best alternative is selected. Of the dizzying array of options, the choice of what to teach via virtual curriculum must be pragmatic, pro-nation, and contemporary.

Delivery (How should we teach): Holding of students prisoner in cages (okay, classrooms) by unimaginative teachers must surely be done away with. According to researchers and educators, "Young people don't want to be passive learners: They are content producers, not just consumers. They communicate in different ways than older generations, in shorter bursts, and they are used to being a part of large networks that allow them instant feedback on their thoughts and ideas."

With changes in demographics, technology, globalization, etc., the world of pedagogy has also changed. Flipped classrooms, interactive

for the students of the future who will be very different from their predecessors. Unless the disjunctions with them are identified and addressed, educational institutions will be out of synch and fail to serve future generations. In fact, in today's technology driven world, it may be emphasized that the smart student has access to the world's knowledge systems. Teachers will only make themselves look foolish if they bring to class outdated and outmoded perspectives. Apparently, some still do!

In fact, according to Professor Anant Agarwal "Technology is casting a spotlight on the innovation of massively open [online] courses, of dynamic new study options that are available to everyone, regardless of background or location" and may mean that "In the future, you could go to university having done the first year of content online. You could then come and have the campus experience for two years, before going on to get a job in industry where you become a continuous learner for the rest of your life." Agarwal sees technology as providing flexibility, combined with instant online feedback, to vastly improve learning outcomes.

Disruptive innovations in education that combine methodology, technology, and organizational format for knowledge delivery are on the rise and will challenge or may even replace the university of the future. Imaginative players, by meeting the needs of specific target groups, could potentially draw "customers" away from academia. In fact accreditation systems may also change to enable creative knowledge producers to package it in innovative and demand-driven ways and thus bypass academia. Lest academia is caught sleeping, it must also innovate.

In this milieu, the traditional teachers need to develop professional competencies beyond subject matter. Their academic attainments and content expertise may be substantial, but they may not be versed in the emerging pedagogical tools that can help shape modern students. Yet, when asked to sign up for professional development, many react predictably: they are loathe to sign up and their demeanor reflects a certain "I don't need to learn" haughtiness.

It is time to have a deeper dialogue on key two matters: what is the student of the future going to be like and how should academic institutions prepare to meet their needs. It will be important to involve, educators, employers, policy makers and students to work together and help shape the nation's knowledge needs and build effective and relevant knowledge systems.

With new thinking on the future university, a clearer role of higher education, continuous research, and technology integration, perhaps we will really begin to build world class knowledge systems.

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continue to do so at a faster rate. Unless the curriculums are updated - continuously - our students will be equipped with dated and obsolete knowledge and rendered non-competitive. Every academic unit, department, centre or institute offering an academic program must bear the responsibility of updating curriculum, the content of which must be crisp and relevant and for the times.

It must also be recognized that it may not be possible to offer the full menu of knowledge products to our students given contextual and resource challenges. Thus we must be selective. If this selectivity is driven by national priorities, aligned with pre-college stages, delivered by competent teaching staff, and properly resourced, the value addition can be remarkable. Content

approaches, group discussions, problem-solving, computer simulations, role playing, case analyses, introspective paragraphs, critical thinking, writing questions (not answers), research, and much more have been shown to be most effective in "reaching" students, not teaching them.

Dovetailing the above methods with students' new learning options, styles and expectations, especially in the context of new technology, social media, and alternate learning sources, means that the teaching-learning environment must change. Some believe that students of the future are less likely to be seeking a degree. They will come with a wide range of backgrounds, but specific skill needs.

Is academia thinking along these lines? It is thus vitally important to anticipate and prepare

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Outshining our neighbours in gender equality

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

ANY years ago, in 1992, after Amartya Sen had just moved to Cambridge, USA, to take up his residence at Harvard University, I met him at the Harvard Faculty Club for an informal lunch. I was very impressed by his work on "missing women" in India and China published a year ago. I asked him why these two countries, which were much more affluent than Bangladesh, had a higher male to female birth ratio than Bangladesh. His reply then still resonates with me. He said look at the skewed "opportunity set" and the discrimination that women face outside the household.

Amartya Sen's intuition more than two decades ago goes a long way to explain the greater gender equality rating for Bangladesh as compared with its bigger neighbours, according to the Global Gender Gap Report, 2015 undertaken by World Economic Forum (WEF). According to this latest report, out of the 145 countries surveyed, Bangladesh ranked 64th, while India, Pakistan and China ranked 114, 144, and 87, respectively, in terms of Gender Equality Index. Pakistan could have ended up as the last, and was saved only by Yemen. "The least equal country in the world for women, ranking

145th, was Yemen. In that Middle Eastern nation, only 55 percent of women can read and only 6 percent attend college. There are no women in the Yemeni equivalent of Congress," the report finds. The most equal country in the world for women was Iceland, according to the report. It has been in the top

What do we learn from these studies? Why did Bangladesh rank above India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka? The answer is not very difficult to delineate. The criteria used to construct the Gender Gap Index appear to shed Bangladesh's experience and its socio-economic transformation in a new light. The

Country	Gender Equality Score (0.00=Inequality; 1.00 Equality)	Rank	Male to Female ratio at birth
Bangladesh	.704	64	.96
Sri Lanka	.69	79	.96
China	.683	87	.87
India	.646	114	.89
Pakistan	.552	141 (out of 142)	.95

slot for seven years in a row. The next four countries are also Nordic - Norway, Finland, Sweden and Ireland. There are many indices, for example World Bank's Global Gender Gap Index, which gives a slightly different ranking, but the Nordic countries still are at the top.

WEF report looks at whether men and women have the same rights and opportunities in each country in four areas: health, education, economic participation, and political empowerment. Bangladesh has provided better opportunity for women in all

four areas, particularly labour force participation, in women's role as "legislators, senior officials, and managers", and the health and survival category.

How did Nordic countries top the list? "They have the best policies in the world for families," says the report's lead author, Saadia Zahidi. "Their childcare systems are the best and they have the best laws on paternity, maternity and family leave." Women are much more likely than men to experience major career interruptions related to family caregiving. And working mothers are much more likely than working fathers to say that being a working parent has made it harder for them to get ahead in their job or career, said Parker of the Pew Research Center. WHO studies also found that maternal deaths and pregnancy-related conditions cannot be eliminated without the empowerment of women.

What's more interesting is that our progression to this position has been steady. Bangladesh ranked 91 in 2006, and has moved up since then. The WEF data shows that Bangladesh's quantitative score in the categories of economic opportunities, education, health and politics improved between 2006-2015.

Now how can we do better in closing the gender gap in the coming years? Again, if we turn to Amartya Sen's findings on male-

female ratio at birth, we find plenty of clues. Scientists have determined that at child birth, more boys are born than girls. The normal rate is 105 males to each female. Why, one might ask? The simple answer is the higher ratio of male is nature's way of accommodating their fragility. However, South Korea faced a situation where in 1990, there were 116.5 male births for 100 female births, the highest in the world. Boys were preferred to girls for many reasons: to inherit property, worship ancestors, care for parents, and continue the family lineage. The South Korean society collectively took notice and addressed the situation head-on, to bring it down to the current rate which is 107.5. How did it bring about such a dramatic change? It took actions to allow families to use either the mother or father's family name and civil society shied away from the practice of fathers being considered the legal head of family. The courts also ruled that families don't have to take the father's name. And, finally, South Korea's Parliament strengthened a medical law banning the sex detection of a fetus: first, by taking away the medical license and then adding a jail term.

The writer is an economist.

QUOTABLE Quote

JACQUES RANCIÈRE

Whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- They may be furrowed
- Museum-based
- Museum piece
- Speculate
- Barnraising group
- Asian assassin
- Witch groups
- Astronaut Grissom
- Serpent's victim
- Lacking luxury
- Plaines
- Nervous
- Early Mexican
- File menu option
- Queen of the fairies
- Bat abodes
- Gardner of "Mogambo"
- Imitating
- Hot
- Light woode
- In the thick of
- Love affair
- Cruise vessel
- Ranch animal

DOWN

- Prepared for impact
- Take out
- Relish tray items
- Judicious
- Wiry-haired dog
- Take in
- AP rival
- Tears
- Wrong
- Put a stop to
- Basking goals
- Reacts to a bop on the head
- One of three in a row
- Broad st.
- Deli buy
- Arthur's resting place
- Moses of the NBA
- Redress
- Maine city
- Plotters' group
- Leave out
- Haul into court
- Timetable abbr.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

C	A	N	A	L	P	A	W	N	S
O	M	E	G	A	E	T	H	E	L
D	I	V	E	D	A	L	A	M	O
H	U	R	T	L	A	N	D		
E	S	S	N	E	W	A	T	O	P
L	E	A	S	E	L	A	I	N	G
D	R	I	N	E	S	S	O	D	E
S	T	E	P	A	L	U	M		
H	I	V	E	S	A	R	E	A	S
O	N	E	A	L	P	I	A	N	O
P	A	R	T	Y	D	O	N	T	S

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott