



Collaborative Learning: An Innovative Method of Teaching

KEYWORDS

Evolution of Teaching, Innovative Methodologies, Collaboration.

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ABSTRACT *The future of the country is in the hands of the students. It is necessary to ensure that the teaching reaches them. Teaching includes two major components sending and receiving information. Ultimately, a teacher tries his/her best to impart knowledge. Any communication method that serves this purpose without destroying the objective could be considered as method of teaching. The use of innovative methods in educational institutions may enhance teaching. It has the potential to improve education; to empower teachers and students and to galvanize the effort to achieve the human development goal of the country. The paper discusses about evolution of teaching and highlights why change is necessary and how change is possible. The paper proposes "Collaborative learning" an innovative teaching methodology. Moreover, the paper critically analyses the proposed method and lists its advantage in enhancing effectiveness in teaching.*

INTRODUCTION:

'Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man' says Swami Vivekananda. His ideologies in education give a wholesome view about education and its role in building the next generation of the nation. Education is constructive. It helps a person to show his/her best by their mind and spirit. It gives a lot of knowledge in variety of aspects. Education plays a vital role in success- both personal and professional. A person who gets good education will become a good citizen, more dependable worker. Without education a person is incomplete, so education makes a man complete. It makes him a good thinker and an effective decision maker. All are not Ekalavya to learn by themselves. Proper teaching by teachers is required to gain knowledge and succeed in life. The paper discusses about evolution of teaching and highlights why change is necessary and how change is possible. The paper proposes "Collaborative learning" an innovative teaching methodology. Moreover, the paper critically analyses the proposed method and lists its advantage in enhancing effectiveness in teaching.

EVOLUTION OF TEACHING

About 3000 BC, with the advent of writing, education became more conscious or self-reflecting, with specialized occupations such as scribe and astronomer requiring particular skills and knowledge. Philosophy in ancient Greece led to questions of educational method entering national discourse. In India, gurukula pattern was followed. Children went and stayed in the guru's (Teacher) house and attended teaching sessions and acquired knowledge and training to lead a peaceful life. However, education was reserved only to Andhanas and Kshatriyas. The system was powerful and was followed for many years in the country.

Comenius, in Bohemia, wanted children to learn. According to his view, 'The World is in Pictures'. He created an illustrated textbook of things children would be familiar with in everyday life and used it to teach children. In this period a few residential universities came up in India for imparting knowledge and worldly wisdom. However, education was still reserved to a few people based on caste. Gender also played a significant role. Female members of the society were refused education.

The Prussian education system was a system of mandatory education dating to the early 19th century. Parts of the Prussian education system have served as models for the education systems in a number of other countries, including Japan, United States, England and India. The Prussian model required classroom management skills to be incorporated into the teaching process.

In the pre-technology education context, the teacher is the sender or the source, the educational material is the information or message, and the student is the receiver of the information. In terms of the delivery medium, the educator can deliver the message via the "chalk-and-talk" method and overhead projector (OHP) transparencies. This directed instruction model has its foundations embedded in the behavioral learning perspective (Skinner, 1938) and it is a popular technique, which has been used for decades as an educational strategy in all institutions of learning. Basically, the teacher controls the instructional process, the content is delivered to the entire class and the teacher tends to emphasize factual knowledge. In other words, the teacher delivers the lecture content and the students listen to the lecture. Thus, the learning mode tends to be passive and the learners play little part in their learning process (Orlich et al., 1998). It has been found in most universities by many teachers and students that the conventional lecture approach in classroom is of limited effectiveness in both teaching and learning. In such a lecture students assume purely passive role and their concentration fades off after 15-20 minutes.

Newer teaching aids such as television, radio, internet, multimedia and other modern devices were slowly incorporated in teaching. Some educators believe that the use of technology, while facilitating learning to some degree, is not a substitute for educational methods that encourage critical thinking and a desire to learn. A popular teaching method that is being used by a vast majority of teachers is hands on activities. Hands-on activities are activities that require movement, talking, and listening, it activates multiple areas of the brain. "The more parts of your brain you use, the more likely you are to retain information," says Judy Dodge, author of 25 Quick Formative Assessments for a Differentiated Classroom.

Currently, educators are towards innovative teaching methods that integrates new teaching strategies and methods into a classroom. Research on education supports the benefits that certain processes, tools and methods have on learning. Innovative teachers implement new methods before they appeal to mainstream educators. Technology plays a key role in innovative teaching. Innovative teachers use new technology and methods to enhance or expand upon the student experience. The transition from traditional blackboard and overhead projector instruction into computer-aided presentations was innovative. Innovative teachers incorporate tools like tablet computers and mobile devices to offer students a more interactive experience. Innovative teaching also involves creativity on the part of the teacher. Innovative teachers sometimes reorganize the educational process. "Flipped classrooms" is a popular example of innovative teaching method. In a flipped classroom, the teacher offers students a conventional lecture or knowledge-building experience out of class, such as a video-taped lecture. Students then complete activities, case studies and more lab-based projects in the classroom. The teacher serves as a guide or consultant. The primary motive of innovative teaching is encouraging students to engage more in the learning process. When students interact with teachers and peers, they gain more practical experience and retain more information from a class.

WHY IS CHANGE NECESSARY?

During the later half of the 20th century, international thinking about education began to shift to a new paradigm. This shift was driven by an awareness of massive and ongoing social, economic and technological changes, and the exponentially increasing amount of human knowledge being generated as a result. International thinking began to seriously examine about the role and purpose of education in a world with an unprecedented degree of complexity, fluidity and uncertainty. Alongside economic, social, political and technological changes, many serious challenges which are highly complex, uncertain, and value-laden characterize the 21st century world. It is argued that learners and teachers, educators and community need support to actively develop the capabilities they need, to productively engage in 21st century wicked problem solving.

Changes are required for betterment. A person can achieve success only when he is able to change himself according to the circumstances. Positive change is to be brought in the teaching methodology too.

The learning pyramid sourced from National Training Laboratories, Bethel, clearly indicates that 75% learning happens when doing things. From the pyramid, it can be inferred that, traditional methods are not enough for the current generation students socialised in an era of information and computer technology. Moreover, a few shortcomings of the traditional methods identified are,

- Teaching in classroom using chalk and talk is "one way flow" of information.
- Teachers often continuously talk for an hour without often giving room for students response and feedback.
- The material presented is only based on lecturer notes and textbooks.
- Teaching and learning are concentrated on "plug and play" method rather than practical aspects.
- There is insufficient interaction with students in classroom.

- More emphasis is on theory rather than practical knowledge.
- Learning from memorizing but not understanding.
- More focus on marks rather than knowledge.

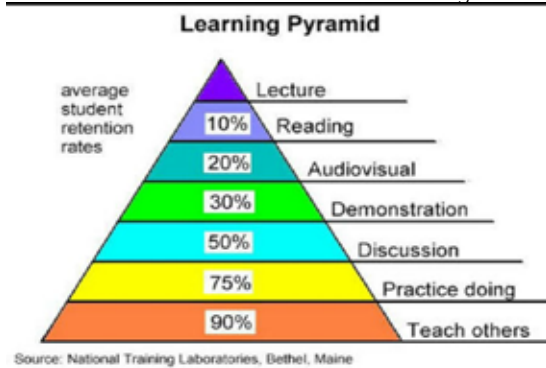


Figure: 1 Showing The Learning Pyramid

HOW CHANGE CAN BE MADE POSSIBLE?

to make teaching suitable and effective for the current era, educators may welcome a few new methods. The following section discusses about methodologies, when practiced may lead to the requisite change of effective teaching.

The role of ICT in Teaching

Technology is also changing the classroom experience. The classrooms at New York University's Leonard N Stern School of Business feature all sorts of conveniences for students and teachers. For instance, the room is wired with cameras for photographing whiteboards, so students can receive the images as digital files. In addition, tablet PCs, compact computers that allow you to write notes directly onto the screen with a special pen, replace the archaic projector. The tablet technology allow professors to make notes on charts and spreadsheets and send them directly to their students' PCs and he will get a feedback from each student. This way both teachers and students get benefited. ICT allows for more such innovations in teaching. However it has its own limitations too. The SWOT of ICT enabled teaching is presented as follows:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Independent learning.	Dependence on internet connectivity. Expensive resources. Incompatibility of hardware and software. Stressful when time-limited assignments are given.
Better student engagement.	
Connected both in and out of class.	
Meaningful use of study material.	
Instant results and feedback.	
Adjustable timings.	

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Flexibility in scheduling of classes.	Internet shorthand in assignments. Chat sessions and other distractions. Exchanging ids and passwords for assignments. Teacher jobs.
Uniform reach of content.	
Handles faculty shortage.	
Easier to understand content, especially for international students.	
User friendly.	

2. Personalizing learning-

Personalizing learning aligns with the idea that education

systems must move away from an Industrial Age “one-size-fits-all” model. The idea of “personalising learning” calls for reversing the “logic” of education systems so that the system is built around the learner, rather than the learner being required to fit with the system. This challenges educators to think about how to deploy the resources for learning (teachers, time, spaces, technology) more flexibly to meet learners’ needs. It also requires them to think about the new resources that may be needed, beyond those traditionally thought of as part of the learning system, and to think about how best to support learners’ access to those resources. While personalizing learning-based approaches are being implemented in a limited way, in pockets and/or at the margins of the sector, the “deep personalization” argued for by future-focused educationalists, is still a long way.

3. A curriculum that uses knowledge to develop learning capacity

One of the biggest challenges for education in the 21st century is that ideas about curriculum are currently underpinned by at least two quite different epistemologies, or models of what counts as knowledge. The first view is the “traditional” idea of knowledge as content, concepts and skills selected from the disciplines to form the “subjects” or “learning areas” of the college curriculum. From this point of view, knowledge is seen as something that does things, as being more energy-like than matter-like, more like a verb than a noun. Knowledge, in the Knowledge Age, involves creating and using new knowledge to solve problems and find solutions to challenges as they arise on a “just-in-time” basis. These ideas about knowledge have emerged in the world outside education driven in large part by economic, social and political changes, often facilitated by new technologies.

4. Rethinking learners’ and teachers’ roles

Twenty-first century ideas about knowledge and learning demand shifts in the traditional roles or “scripts” followed by learners and teachers. If the purpose of schools is not to transmit knowledge, then teachers’ roles must be reconceived. Similarly, if the learner’s main job is no longer to absorb and store up knowledge to use in the future, then learners’ roles and responsibilities also need to be reconceived. This calls for a greater focus on recognising and working with learners’ strengths, and thinking about what role teachers can play in supporting the development of every learner’s potential.

5. A culture of continuous learning for teachers and educators

All of the principles discussed above suggest that teachers, school leaders, educational policy leaders and other adults supporting young people’s learning need particular attributes and capabilities that enable them to work effectively towards a future-oriented learning system. It is important to note that some of the approaches advocated for 21st century learning—and the ideas that underpin them—may differ from what today’s teachers, school leaders and educational policy leaders experienced in their own school learning. Teachers and school leaders may resist adapting current approaches if they don’t see the need for change, or if they aren’t convinced that adapting current approaches is possible, let alone likely to lead to better student outcomes.

6. New kinds of partnerships and relationships

Colleges are no longer soloed from the community. Learning for the 21st century, it is argued, should support stu-

dents to engage in knowledge-generating activities in authentic contexts. Students must learn to recognise and navigate authentic problems and challenges in ways that they are likely to encounter in future learning situations. However, today many learners encounter learning situations in which the “messiness” of the real world is simplified as contrived learning tasks with answers or outcomes already known to the teacher. A final argument associated with this theme is that education and learning systems will not have traction to shift towards more 21st century approaches if this shift is not supported by the wider community. Public education is a collective good in which everyone has a stake.

The ideas listed above, if approached in a positive way, may bring effectiveness in teaching and learning. However, an individual teacher may not autonomy in implementing these concepts of learning. As an aid to an individual teacher who wants to practise new methods for effective teaching a method called Collaborating Learning is put forth.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The paper now proceeds to introduce an innovative method called Collaborating Learning, which is considered suitable by the authors to make learning happen amidst current generation students, within the limits of class room.

Collaboration allows students to actively participate in the learning process by talking with each other and listening to other points of view. Collaboration establishes a personal connection between students and the topic of study and it helps students think in a less personally biased way. Teachers may employ collaboration to assess student’s abilities to work as a team, leadership skills, understanding of the topic and presentation abilities.

How to use Collaborative Learning as teaching methodology?

Collaborative learning is a democratic way of handling class. In this method both the teacher and the students have to make active participation. The teacher has to introduce the topic. The students can be divided into groups of 5-6 members. Each group has to be given a sub theme based on the topic and has to be allowed for discussion about the theme for 45minutes. At the end of the discussion time, each group has to present their ideas about their theme given to them to the rest of the class. The class can confront the ideas presented. It is the responsibility of the teacher to see that each member in a group involves in discussion and presentation of ideas. Compute technology can be used to make presentations. Every group has to present their theme and confrontation of ideas would be followed. When all the groups has completed the teacher has to give her concluding remarks. The evaluation has to be done by the teacher to individual students based on their presentation.

Collaborative learning may enhance student understanding, add context to academic content, broaden student perspectives, highlight opposing viewpoints, reinforce knowledge, build confidence, and support community in learning. The opportunities for meaningful and engaging in-class discussion may vary widely, depending on the subject matter and format of the course. The method will be more effective by probing more questions among the students, paraphrasing the information received and using questions to develop critical thinking with questions.

BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS

1. Break complex tasks into parts and steps
2. Plan and manage time
3. Refine understanding through discussion and explanation
4. Give and receive feedback on performance
5. Develop stronger communication skills.
6. Develop skills specific to collaborative efforts, allowing students to:
 - Tackle more complex problems than they could on their own.
 - Delegate roles and responsibilities.
 - Share diverse perspectives.
 - Pool knowledge and skills.
 - Hold one another (and be held) accountable.
 - Receive social support and encouragement to take risks.
 - Develop new approaches to resolve differences.
 - Establish a shared identity with other group members.
 - Find effective peers to emulate.
 - Develop their own voice and perspectives in relation to peers.

However, while the potential learning benefits of group work are significant, simply assigning group work is no guarantee that these goals will be achieved. In fact, group projects can – and often do – backfire badly when they are not designed, supervised, and assessed in a way that promotes meaningful teamwork and deep collaboration.

BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

Faculty can often assign more complex, authentic problems to groups of students than they could to individuals. Group work also introduces more unpredictability in teaching, since groups may approach tasks and solve problems in novel, interesting ways. This can be refreshing for instructors. Additionally, group assignments can be useful when there are a limited number of viable project topics to distribute among students. And they can reduce the number of final products instructors have to grade.

Whatever the benefits in terms of teaching, instructors should take care only to assign as group work tasks that truly fulfill the learning objectives of the course and lend themselves to collaboration. Instructors should also be aware that group projects can add work for faculty at different points in the semester and introduce its own grading complexities.

CONCLUSION

Across the world, information technology is dramatically altering the way the world is moving. Internet-ready phones, handheld computers, digital cameras, and MP3 players are revolutionizing the college life too. As the demand for technology continues to rise, colleges and universities are moving all sorts of student services, from laundry monitoring to snack delivery online. From the above, we can make out that the Information and communication technology has made many innovations in the field of teaching and learning mandatory. In the new paradigm of learning, the role of student is more active. The concepts of paperless and pen less classroom are emerging as an alternative to the old teaching learning method. Nowadays there is democratization of knowledge and the role of the teacher is changing to that of facilitator. We need to have interactive teaching and this changing role of education is inevitable with the introduction of multimedia technology and the spawning of a technologically-savvy generation of youths.

However, the stake holders of 'education' should see to that the new methods approached has to enhance the value system of the students.

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