



Re-imagining education and learning in the post pandemic era

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Twenty-first century world is undoubtedly a VUCA world – a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world where we are faced with unique and unheard-of challenges almost on a regular basis. Since the turn of the century, the chaotic, turbulent, and rapidly changing environments in which we live have become the 'new normal'. Exploding technological developments, dramatic demographic growth, immigration, ecological disasters, and geographical trends disrupt our lives at an ever-increasing pace and breadth. These circumstances, accelerated by the global pandemic have caused major breakdown of order in almost all organizations, including education and higher education, as the four VUCA components of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity interact with each other in chaotic and sometimes conflicting ways.

¹ Dr. Shauli Mukherjee. With a purposeful career in the education space spanning over more than 20 years, Dr. Shauli Mukherjee has dedicated her life towards promotion of child-centric and activity-oriented education. A passionate educationist and a thought leader with a background of setting up and leading new age K- 12 schools, Dr. Mukherjee had been the Founder Principal of Adamas World School and STEM World School, the first STEM school in West Bengal. Under her inspiring leadership, STEM World School has been ranked and awarded as the 2nd best International Day School in West Bengal by Education World. Dr. Mukherjee ardently believes that the purpose of meaningful education is to develop lifelong learners, creative thinkers and responsible global citizens who are confidently equipped to face the challenges of an uncertain and constantly unfolding future. All through her career in education, Dr. Mukherjee had actively contributed to and spearheaded the process of creating a personalized, engaging, and stress-free curriculum for children of all age groups. She has been the recipient of numerous awards and accolades including NATIONAL QUALITY EXCELLENCE AWARD, GEM OF INDIA AWARD, SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN AWARD, GURUPNISHAD SAMMAN, GURUVARYA SAMMAN, NATIONAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AWARD in the category of commitment to excellence in education, (to name a few), WORLD PEACE AWARD. She has also been awarded for being among INDIA'S TOP 50 WOMEN LEADERS IN THE EDUCATION INDUSTRY & TOP 20 REVOLUTIONARY EDUCATION LEADERS by the Academic Council of ULektz. She is associated with premiere educational organizations across India as well as globally in senior advisory capacity. She is also recognized among 99 WOMEN ACHIEVERS OF INDIA FOR THE YEAR 2021. As a highly prolific motivational speaker, she is regularly invited to numerous national and international conferences, summits, conclaves and events to share her insights on the futuristic and transformative role of education. She is currently working as the Director of School of Education and Dean of Students' Affairs at Adamas University, Kolkata.

In the past one and a half years since the world has been embroiled in a global pandemic, there have been considerable debates, dialogues and discussions about how higher education should both cope with its immediate threat while also considering pivots toward new models and innovations for the future. Courtesy to the COVID times which had caused major disruptions to our traditional thought patterns concerning education and on the positive note, had actually compelled us to think and act out of the box and embrace considerable flexibility and adaptability and devise innovative strategies and methods to significantly address the emerging complexities concerning the sphere of education and higher education.

Conventional and traditional educational norms force our learners to metaphorically colour within the lines – that is, to comply, to conform and to compete. Every learner is given the same amount of time to learn the same thing in the same manner and preferably on the same day. No wonder that the learners struggle miserably to realize their true potential. We must realize that the real world, beyond the confines of the fancy physical infrastructure of a higher education institution, rewards those amply who can actually think out of the box and can carve their own path. Moreover, in order to sustain and thrive in the twenty-first century ever increasingly complex workforce, the learners have to be oriented more towards collaboration and cooperation rather than only cut-throat competition. In order to address and challenge the emerging global complexities, the world does not require mechanically trained minds loaded only with a vast repertoire of facts and figures – minds which are systematically formulated to think alike, rather the world needs innovative and creative minds which are capable of divergent thinking and out of the box ideation.

It is worthwhile to cite here that Industry 1.0 in the 18th century had been an era of mechanization. Industry 2.0 in the 19th and early 20th century had been an era of mass production. Industry 3.0 in the 20th century had been an era of computers and quite significantly, Industry 4.0 in the 21st century is an era of smart machines and globalization with its focus on autonomous robots, augmented reality, additive manufacturing, Big Data, Cloud Computing, Cyber Security, Cyber Physical System, Internet of Things, Simulation and System Integration. There can be no doubt that the skill sets required to thrive in the 21st century ever increasingly globally complex workforce happens to be complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people

management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, effective judgement, and decision making, service orientation, negotiation and cognitive flexibility. Additionally, there needs to be a significant prioritization on people and team orientation, self-management with focus on self-development and self-awareness, analytical mindset and learning orientation, creativity and innovation, business and entrepreneurial orientation, cross cultural orientation and social sensitivity, dealing with uncertainties and changes, integration of technology, communication and data, globalization, and last but not the least, solution orientation and problem solving.

Accordingly, in order to prepare our young learners to cope with the diverse challenges of the 21st century, we must allow them more time which they can effectively utilize in following their curiosity, creating, sharing, exploring and experimenting with their unique and novel ideas. The educators and the responsible adults have to stop stigmatizing failures and mistakes and realize that they are both essential and integral components of a significant learning experience. If we truly want our present generation to evolve into creative problem solvers, we must give them ample scope to explore the 3 essential Ps:

- Play
- Passion
- Purpose

It is undoubtedly a potent combination of Play, Passion and Purpose that makes a person truly creative. We must allow these creative minds to not only seek innovative solutions to the problems but also to probe and look for inherent problems in the existing solutions. Our young learners must take complete ownership and responsibility of their own learning and in order to turn it into a visible reality, they must be given both choice and voice to determine and ascertain what, where and how they would want to learn. The teachers and the parents must significantly attempt to develop a growth mindset among the learners. It is of no matter what one's ability is – one's effort is what ignites that ability and turns it into an accomplishment. The passion for stretching oneself and sticking to it, even when things are not going that great is the hallmark of the growth mindset that will allow our young learners to

thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives. Additionally, we must aim to develop our learners into self-motivated learners as well as life-long learners who will be committed to learning, unlearning, and re-learning at their own pace in all significant phases of their lives. We all have these three basic and innate psychological needs – competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When these innate needs are satisfied, we become motivated, productive, and happy. When our inner drive to be autonomous, self - determined and connected to one another is liberated, we achieve more and lead truly fulfilling lives. This is so true and of utmost relevance to our young learners as well.

In order to nurture such creative minds of our young learners effectively, the educators, the education leaders, the education policy makers – that is the entire educational fraternity needs to redefine and re-imagine their roles in driving this momentous shift towards empowering individual learners by maximizing their learning potential to ultimately evolve into self-motivated life-long learners. Both the educator as well as the learner have to wholeheartedly embrace the benefits of anytime and anywhere learning and have to stay committed to continuous learning, unlearning and re-learning across all significant phases of their lives. In fact, one of the positive offshoots of the global pandemic happens to be the paradigm shift from teaching to learning when it comes to the educators, who, we all presume would continue to inspire, motivate, stimulate and at the same time facilitate the love for life-long learning among the learners as well as among themselves. It is for all of us to realize and appreciate the fact that teaching is not a mechanical task or process of transfer of facts and content from one to another. It is rather the most sophisticated and creative profession which helps to enable the young learners to evolve into more confident, equipped, dynamic and authentic versions of themselves.