

The 21st Century Teacher and Life-long Learning

Traditionally, once a person graduated with a Degree, a Diploma or Certificate in Education, one easily settled into a routine career that has largely entailed teaching and examining of students. As long as one got the nationally-prescribed syllabus covered, one could count the job well done.

Today, however, the world has changed and there are new dynamics being experienced globally. The core academics, while still relevant in the market place, are no longer the only determinant of one securing productive employment or engagement in the market place and society in general. Rather, the academics must today go hand-in-hand with other relevant ‘out-of class’ competencies. The ‘global village’, as the world is commonly referred to as today, is highly digitized, therefore demanding workers who are technology savvy. Employers globally are also emphasizing more than ever the need of soft skills including excellent communication, critical thinking and creativity in problem solving, ability to engage in team work as well as possession of social and emotional intelligences. All these are skills that enable a person enrich the work place experience- beyond getting the technical work done. To compound the demands of the new market place is the existence of the new ‘millennial’ generation that is ‘no longer at ease’ or content with the way things were done during their parents’ generation. They are eager, they want things to happen fast (and furious). They want to ‘make it’ fast. The traditional classroom set-up where they sit listening to the teacher is not conducive to them.

The long and short of it, the learning environment must adapt to the new dynamics. Teaching methods must shift from the traditional teacher-centered ones where the teacher was viewed as the source and ‘transmitter’ of all knowledge, to the modern learner-centered approaches whereby the learner is actively engaged in the learning and knowledge-creation process- through research, class presentations, peer and self-assessment among other methods. These approaches keep the learners interested as they enquire, innovate and discover new ideas for themselves.

So where does it all leave the teacher- the facilitator of learning (note not knowledge)? To remain relevant, the 21st Century teacher, at whatever level of learning, must constantly engage in learning and self-upgrading with the skills in demand. The teacher must be digitally literate and be able to apply the modern learner-centered learning methods. In addition, today’s teacher should be equipped with skills to identify learners with specific talents outside the academics in order to be able to guide them appropriately. The teacher must also possess the various soft skills to be able to provide positive role models to the learners.

This calls for the practicing teacher to continually engage in professional development in order to be fully equipped with emerging trends of knowledge and skills in the various fields. A college certificate by itself is necessary, but not enough. In a nutshell, a 21st century teacher must engage in life-long learning.

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