

Teacher Collaboration Key To Innovative Education After Pandemic

As the pandemic is approaching its second year, it paints a clearer picture of how the new normal in teaching and learning will transform future education.

There are always two “legs” in any successful eLearning strategies. The first and foremost one is hardware primarily related to essential devices and network connectivity. It mostly concerns budget availability and is not difficult to deal with. The second one is about digital learning content, pedagogy and assessment which concern the transformation of traditional classroom settings. It requires a lot of innovations and is indeed a grand challenge to any education system.

In Hong Kong, digital assessment was among the first to ride the wave of eLearning boom while traditional, pen-and-paper assessment was disrupted during the pandemic. It shows a stark contrast with the traditional understanding of tests. A local online assessment platform called ‘STAR’ operated by Hong Kong Education City (EdCity), for example, contains thousands of well-calibrated assessment items that can accurately and instantly provide feedback to students. Teachers then receive auto-marked reports which not only show students’ individual performance, but also accurately pinpoint particular areas of weaknesses in students’ learning, as well as provide whole-class or whole-level comparisons, or even compare students’ performance with city-wide statistics.

All these valuable analyses and data are not available in traditional teaching. The STAR platform thus opens the door to digital assessment for teachers and even parents, who used to rely on the achieved “scores” of their kids for understanding their strengths and weaknesses. But still there is a long way to go before we can cover all subjects and all levels of studies, and also cater for individual learning differences, as it requires a much larger and more comprehensive scale system with millions of assessment items to be developed by teachers collaboratively.

Another hot topic that follows is replacing printed textbooks with digital versions. Now that more educators are anticipating blended learning - an integration of face-to-face teaching and online learning - will be the new normal in post-pandemic education. The pace of replacing printed contents would certainly speed up. During class suspension last year, we have seen numerous teachers teach online with all sorts of digital materials created by themselves, and their dedication to addressing students’ learning needs is highly acclaimed.

Nevertheless, effective online learning also requires professional design of digital contents for a

seamless integration into digital tools and platforms. Thankfully the pandemic aroused an awareness of the need for a massive amount of quality digital contents and sophisticated learning platforms. A blessing in disguise in modernizing local education. But this would only be possible with coordinated collaboration among teachers, unleashing the well-developed contents and associated pedagogy already adopted in some pioneering schools.

The digital transformation in education, together with blended learning, requires more than just technology but also hands-on engagement and commitment of frontline teachers. And a major obstacle is that schools and teachers will bear massive burden when revolutionizing teaching methods, from adopting digital contents and learning platforms, to designing new classes and curricula.

As researched by Prof Michael Fullan in his revolutionary project in Toronto, the success for an education system change hinges on establishing a community of practice, where teachers can share and develop while education leaders can lead and evaluate. The post-pandemic era will shed light on the importance of in-depth collaboration among teachers - in terms of developing and sharing assessment items, digital contents and pedagogy. It would be crucial to the success of the digital transformation.

In the past two decades, EdCity has been devoted to a similar mission by offering a myriad of services, workshops, seminars and online platforms for teachers. Playing an instrumental role in all this is the annual Learning and Teaching Expo (LTE) that has spanned 10 years. Each year it connects tens of thousands of international and local educators for professional exchange of innovative ideas, while showcasing the latest education technology from around the world, including the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, Finland and so forth.

Last year EdCity held the first-ever Innovative Teacher Award in its 20th anniversary, honouring pioneering teachers from local primary, secondary and special schools. The objective was to recognise innovative teachers and publicize their innovative strategies to inspire their counterparts. As time goes by, a strong community of innovative teachers can be formed to lead future education innovation in the city and even inspire the world. The awardees have recently shared their innovative teaching strategies on OECD's Global Teaching Insights platform.

The pandemic only marks the beginning of the digital transformation in education, and there are many issues that have yet to be addressed. A major concern of teachers is that online assessment is vulnerable to cheating as students can find answers online. The traditional way of thinking could suggest monitoring students with cameras. But here comes a more fundamental question: If being

able to self-study online will be the future norm, why should we worry about students' getting answers online for assessment? Are we teaching and testing students with knowledge that they can readily get online, or should we teach them something more important such as deductive judgement and decision-making, problem-solving and creative thinking?

Let's break away from the traditional way of teaching and thinking. In the digital age, education needs to be re-imagined and designed with vision, making allowance for a future workplace with unimaginable possibilities. Because answers to creating a workforce fit for the future can no longer be found in the established practices of the past.

Written by: Mr Victor Cheng, Executive Director of Hong Kong Education City

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