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Blended learning for Gen Z: Obstacles to overcome

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Abstract

Change is inevitable but the change wittingly or unwittingly should bring more prosperity than adversity. With the passage of time the field of education also faces so many alterations and the introduction of Blended learning is the most befitting example here. The present paper is an attempt to explore the challenges that Gen Z may face while learning through Blended Teaching. These hardships may of various types related with almost every domain of the education. To achieve the fruitful results of blended teaching as well as smooth learning of the Next Generation these obstacles should be overcome on priority basis.

Keywords: Blended Learning, Gen Z

Introduction

Education plays a pivotal role in the life of humans. It helps them to transform from uncivilized to civilized and acceptable members of the society. Owing to sophisticated technological advancements the field of Education faces numerous challenges. Among these a few are adopted well by the learners while many more are still to overcome. Blended Learning is the result of such advancements which is very popular in the contemporary era and is also considered as prominent weapon to cope in the modern world which is full of unpredictable demands of the society. Keeping in mind the importance of Blended Learning the obstacles that it may create cannot be overlooked. In fact it demands collaborative efforts on the behalf of educators, learners, administrators and society to join hands to facilitate the working of such a magical approach. These challenges that next generation learning may face are presented in this paper in the form of questions which are followed by their suitable solutions.

Why is Next Generation Learning so important and so urgent?

Learners of the modern epoch face an uncertain present and a rapidly changing future that will demand far different skills and knowledge than were needed in the 20th century. We also know far more today about enabling deep, powerful learning than we did when public schools were designed in the early 20th century. Our collective future depends on how well young people prepare for the challenges and opportunities of 21st-century life.

The factory model is outdated. But why is that so? Why does our nation so desperately need to change the way learning happens in schools? Is there more to next generation learning than innovation for innovation's sake?

Statistics and trends on education achievement gaps, employer demands, advances in technology, changing demographics are the answer to the above question. Learning science and educational research demonstrate how learning happens and the conditions that support it also how the fast pace of cultural and economic shifts happening around us.

What does Next Generation Learning look like in practice?

We've all had the experience of truly purposeful, authentic learning and know how valuable it is. Educators are taking the best of what we know about learning, student support, effective instruction, and interpersonal skill-building to completely re-imagine schools so that students experience that kind of purposeful learning all day, every day.

Some institutions have provided grant funding to seed New Designs for School that lead to better learning outcomes and have the potential to scale, with the ultimate goal of reversing stagnant academic progress and an unacceptable achievement gap among students. Solving

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this challenge requires taking the best of what we know about learning, student support, equity and cultural relevance, and effective pedagogy to fundamentally, not incrementally, change the learning experience in schools.

These institutions do not prescribe a particular learning strategy, but instead encourages educators to use what they know about good teaching and good learning to imagine and then create New Designs for School. To support educator-designed schools, they offer these general principles:

- Student-centred, mastery-based, and blended
- Delivered on regular public funds
- Able to serve the scale of students the need demands

When educators emphasize a broader, deeper, more integrated definition of student success in their redesign, the schools they create are game-changers. These models can break the inertia that has prevented educational reform from making the dramatic improvements needed for the nation's youth. Solving this challenge would lead to breakthroughs in student learning, high school graduation, and college completion—particularly for low-income students and students of colour.

Such institutions have engaged educators in developing solutions to this challenge through grant investments and a robust content strategy. The first grant opportunity was launched in October 2011. They then spurred innovation in school design through the Regional Funds for Breakthrough Schools, with seven sites around the nation and 88 schools in the midst of designing and launching next gen learning.

How can Assessment best support next generation learning?

Educators are rethinking the purposes, forms, and nature of assessment. Beyond testing mastery of traditional content knowledge—an essential task, but not nearly sufficient—educators are designing assessment for learning as an integral part of the learning process. It's been said that we value what we measure. That's why next generation learning—which values a broader, richer set of cognitive, social, and emotional skills and dispositions—requires new strategies for measurement. Educators taking on the challenge of Reimagining Assessment are creating assessment approaches that support more equitable, personalized, and competency-based learning environments. In contrast to backward-looking assessments of learning, next gen assessments empower students and teachers to move learning forward—in other words, they are assessments for learning.

Educators who are Reimagining Assessment are utilizing performance-based assessments to gather richer evidence of learning, and allowing students to move on when ready once they've demonstrated mastery. They're engaging in formative assessment to provide personalized feedback and guide instructional decisions. Adaptive assessments are reducing time spent on testing. By engaging their communities and deepening opportunities for reflection, next gen educators are helping their systems begin to embrace more balanced, culturally responsive approaches to assessment that put students at the centre. The Assessment for Learning Project initiative aims directly at rethinking the core roles that assessment can play to support student attainment of deeper learning.

How can Technology make Next Generation Learning more effective?

Educators often take advantage of educational technologies as they make the shifts in instruction, teacher roles, and learning experiences that next gen learning requires. Technology should not lead the design of learning, but when educators use it to personalize and enrich learning; it has the potential to accelerate mastery of critical content and skills by all students.

Next generation learning is not about technology. It's about...deep, profound, powerful experiences... students owning their learning... whole-person development and student success. It's quite possible for next generation learning to thrive without a single electronic device, software, or internet service.

The challenge of Technology Tools, then, lies in identifying the technological needs that educators and students of next gen learning have and developing affordable and reliable educational technology to meet those needs. Next gen educators find value in educational technology that coordinates and tracks learning inside and outside of the classroom, Integrates data from multiple sources and records learner profiles and progression through competencies that Enables educators to collaborate and develop professionally. Students of next gen learning find value in educational technology that gives them real-time status of their progress toward personal learning goals. Enables collaboration and communication with peers, teachers, and mentors, also provides access to people, materials, and activities so they may pursue their passions and self-direct their learning.

How can Next Generation Learning advance Educational Equity?

Together, educators are doing the reimagining and reinvention work necessary to make true educational equity possible. Student-centered learning advances equity when it values social and emotional growth alongside academic achievement, takes a cultural lens on strengths and competencies, and equips students with the power and skills to address injustice in their schools and communities.

The challenge of Designing for Equity is making equity an explicit goal and keeping it central to each design choice and next gen learning practice.

Some of the actions educators take when they are designing for Equity include the following:

- Understand their own identity and quench their desire to learn about the injustices their students, colleagues, and communities face because of race, class, gender, ability.
- Seek input from multiple voices, identifying who isn't "at the table."
- Examine curriculum, pedagogy, and student-centered practices with an equity lens; testing for inherent biases and unintended omissions.
- Use a new discourse of belonging, worth, safety, and justice.
- Confront systems, policies, and personal actions that prevent students from reaching their full potential.

How does Next Generation Learning grow?

When educators design and create new schools, and live next gen learning themselves, they take the lead in

growing next gen learning across the nation. Other educators don't simply follow and adopt; next gen learning depends on personal and community agency—the will to own the change, fuelled by the desire to learn from and with others. Networks and policy play important roles in enabling grassroots approaches to change.

The challenge of Building Community for next generation learning hints at its own solution: educators connecting with other educators, creating local momentum that spreads quickly and widely through networks.

They find inspirational mentors, creative problem-solvers, passionate learners, and supportive colleagues who make it possible for them to continue the hard work of creating and recreating a next generation learning experience for their students.

Next gen educators are Building Community by opening their schools to visitors. They share their curriculum and tools as open resources. They create tech platforms to support their learning model and invite other schools to use the platform too.

Why must teachers experience Gen Z learning themselves?

Educators are the lead learners in schools. If they are to enable powerful, authentic, deep learning among their students, they need to live that kind of learning and professional culture themselves. When everyone is part of that experiential through-line, that's when next generation learning thrives.

Next generation learning depends upon a different kind of instruction, in a different kind of learning environment, with new roles for educators. It demands a new mind-set and different skills for teachers, counsellors, specialists, and administrators. But formal preparation for next generation teaching and learning is nascent. Few educators enter next generation schools with prior experiences in redesigned learning environments. And traditional professional development falls short in addressing the challenge of Professional Learning.

Solving this challenge involves three elements

1. The specific and unique competencies required of next generation educators
2. New strategies for providing professional learning opportunities
3. New structures to invest in educators and recognize their learning

Next gen professional learning is built upon the research of adult learning and mirrors the core principles of next gen learning for students: agency, self-direction, and high-quality content personalized to educators' strengths and needs. The learning is ongoing, iterative, collaborative, culturally relevant, focused on mastering competencies through authentic experiences, and data-driven. Micro credentials, coaching, job-embedded learning, and design thinking are shaping the future of professional learning for educators.

How can our education systems best enable Next Generation Learning?

Next generation learning is all about everyone in the system—from students through teachers to policymakers—taking charge of their own learning, development, and work. That doesn't happen by forcing change through mandates

and compliance. It happens by creating the environment and the equity of opportunity for everyone in the system to do their best possible work.

Our education system was designed for stability and conformity, not change nor diversity. To provide students with excellence, we need an education system that is dynamic and flexible, adapting at the speed in which our culture and world are changing.

Every parent wants his or her child to benefit from an excellent education. But the strategies that defined excellence yesterday will likely not generate excellence tomorrow. Our schools have to be more proactive in meeting the changing needs of our world and the students we serve.

The hardest part of creating new designs for school, however, may not be the designs themselves. It may be how to move these new approaches into common use without losing the power, promise, complexity, and depth of the original ideas.

Solving the challenge of Enabling Change means that every person, from child to adult, is a learner. And each learner has a community of supportive partners, opportunity to reflect on current practice and redesign the school experience and license to pilot new ideas. When every person recognizes that they are change agents, with permission and choice to take action, they make next generation learning possible.

Conclusion

In the epilogue it can be concluded that the above discussed challenges are not insurmountable. They can be curtailed with the collaborative efforts of educators, administrators, teachers, learners and of course of society. If we want the learning period of our young generations smooth, enjoyable and informative, we should insure the implementation of blended learning in traditional classrooms. Although the way to achieve this target is not so easy, yet it would be totally incorrect to say that we especially the Asian countries do not have the capabilities and adequate resources to use this new invention for the betterment of our nations.

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