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Evolution and Extinction in Pedagogy: Scope of Blended Learning in Higher Educational Institutions

Dr. Komil Tyagi*

*Assistant Professor (II), Department of English and Research Centre
Mehr Chand Mahajan DAV College for Women, Chandigarh

One of the finest lines of vocations in the world, teaching, holds the supreme place amongst all. Teachers are the architects of humankind that define the perceptions and ambitions of the learner and, value academic and objective labour. The abrupt and traumatic advent of Covid-19 has re-shaped the world in draconian manners, terms and forms. The traditional course of teaching and learning that always held a sacrosanct position is now undergoing a metamorphosis and evolving into several forms with the sudden and forceful switch to online teaching since March 2020. This diluted form of the original structure has led to the evolution and extinction of varied frameworks of pedagogy. The scope of blended learning has brought newer forms to the fore. Certain essential elements of teaching and learning are headed towards developing into different moulds whereas some shall be rendered outdated. The results of both shall soon be witnessed by the larger society. The present paper shall attempt to study the structures of pedagogy involved in higher education that are either progressing towards fruitful progression or thinning away into obsolescence.

The Centre cannot hold: The process or art of pedagogy is performed at many levels; ranging from the learning phase (by teachers), to delivery and comprehension of instruction and making a substantial relationship at all echelons. The ancient or primary form of learning was teacher/*Guru* centric but with time and the onset of modern transformations, it progressed to being learner-centric. However this sudden lockdown of the world has brought **the teacher back to the centre**. The teacher accepted all the challenges with open arms for the stakeholder's (student) future was at risk. They acknowledged the digital revolution overnight, exposed their own homes to public view, accepted cut in salaries, risked the judgement passed by every set of parent eyes

on them, answered queries while nothing was sure, appeared composed on the surface while the tides of uncertainty hit quite often. They took it all, gracefully and deftly, and explicitly held the hand of one and all. The time has brought along insecurities, unsettling feelings and several doubts regarding career and future. No amount of online videos or discourses offering resolutions, free courses, psychological exercises and entertainment could bring the same result as the consolation offered by the teacher, the confidant who stands with the students through thick and thin and has done more of the same in these challenging times.

The students had been and are, dependent on their respective teachers to comb through the massive amount of online material spread across government and private sites to give them the requisite and relevant reference and textual material. It is akin to the traditional Guru who collected the data from the cosmos through *dhyana* and then delivered it to the scholars who recorded their *shruti* to produce significant texts. The pedagogical methods are evolving to be Guru-centric again, for he/she is making sure (from March 2020 to present) that the light of knowledge reaches even to the farthest corner of the planet, with the help of technology. Teachers have reached out and stretched their paradigms to provide the requisite, even at the cost of their own financial and mental well being. “In the midst of this digital shift, teachers also face the additional pressure of converting all teaching material to digital formats, making worksheets, taking classes on platforms like Zoom and Google Classroom, checking WhatsApp images of home works, and reporting all of this information to both parents and principals...and still manage their households” (Sankar 1). This amazing feat performed by more than a million teachers across the world has made the pedagogical exercise teacher-centric once again.

The teacher faced a **precipitous stepping into the other’s world** and an unusual leap towards modern technology. The current generation of higher education scholars belong to the omega technology range, so much so that they consider the digital gadgets as an appendage. Therefore, the emerging education system will weed out teachers (even students) who do not upgrade themselves with the operations of technology. The online/blended/amalgamated/liquid/ combinations of teaching-learning methodologies that were always available but were yet not practiced completely at all stages shall now be given a chance to be explored wholly. The moment a new topic is introduced in a

contact classroom, it is 'googled' up by the generation Z students. The educator always has to compete with the information provided on the internet and also ensure that the method of information transfer has to be more interesting than Google or other sites and that makes the guide look for plenty of ways to incorporate technology into new-fangled classroom activities. The spasmodic dive into online teaching turned the teacher into a technocrat for s/he was either 'zooming' or 'googling' the classroom! Gaining triumph over these major and minor labyrinthine challenges in classrooms everyday is giving the teacher a scope to widen the breadth of her learning. Many teachers who were still practicing the conventional (chalk and board) methods surged into the unknown waters of varied internet handles and surfaced successfully. They approached it as a learning exercise and the otherwise hostile other's world opened their arms to them. It could be seen as a bridge between the technologically advanced and the technologically limited ones and this would help in improving teacher- taught relationships.

However, the journey was and is an uphill task. Though the process of **conceiving need-based blended learning programs** has been initiated by varied universities/HEIs across the world, it is yet deficient in many ways. In countries like India, where the online teaching methodologies are still in their teething stages (considering the number of lectures available on Swayam Prabha, Swayam, e-PG Paathshaala and others), there was an immediate switch which quavered one and all, for there was no preparation time for the same. The University World News opines,

COVID-19 has created an atmosphere for technology-enabled learning in higher education in India. It is time that policy-makers and educators took advantage of the current situation to reform Indian higher education and create a resilient system that supports equity, excellence and expansion. The UGC committee falls short of thinking beyond the current crisis and recommends that, moving forward, just 25% of the syllabus should be taught online. We have to rethink what kind of higher education we need in India. The Ministry of Human Resource Development is in the process of formulating a national policy on education. It is therefore timely that we discuss the nature of teaching and learning in the 21st century in India. (Mishra 1)

Are all Indian institutions equipped with facilities (cameras, recording studios, internet connectivity with strong bandwidth, smart classrooms and much more)? Even the most financially healthy higher education institutions are not technologically equipped for blended learning. Rather than being dependent on governments to design plans for future trajectories of the education system, higher education institutions will have to independently formulate modules of the prescribed syllabus to be taught online. Newer systems have to evolve. Most instructors/educators working in the higher educational institutions (colleges and universities) of India are not trained to teach and therefore **teaching skills have to be acquired through everyday classroom experience**. Since there is no formal training, and the orientation courses come much later in the term, on-job training pursues. This could be seen as an opportunity to create programs where teachers could learn as well. The governments should take initiatives to train the teachers in creating need-based online learning platforms where the best of minds could collaborate to create the finest of blended lessons, for all classes and contexts. And all this has to be achieved with the limited number of resources available at hand.

Teachers will have to open to **ATM: Anytime Teaching-Learning Mechanisms**. Training of the teachers/instructors/tutors/coaches, especially the ones related to Higher Education Institutions has become imperative in these times and the ones to come. There is a wide range of technologically advanced teaching and learning platforms like Cisco-webex, Google classroom, Google meet, etc. and the teachers have to be professionally trained in using them, as all of them exercised the trial and error methods during the last few months. These learning programmes should be made obligatory by the governments as they were completely missing from the existing arrangement which only requires passing an objective type test (of the subject) offered by the UGC. Institutions will have to learn to create learner-friendly, self-paced modules within the limited resources in hand, which will pose itself as a mammoth challenge but has to be structured as per the need of the hour. Not only the approved syllabus but pre and post-training evaluation will also have to be patterned in the shape of multiple interactive assessments. The blended mode of instruction is hypothetically more effectual than physical contact classes. By incorporating blended learning methodologies into class projects, communication between lecturers and learners can

be improved, and students will be able to evaluate their course material better. Teachers will have to organize pre-class preparation, exchange of notes and other reading material and produce a ready repository of all reading and testing material. Therefore, teachers will have to receive rigorous instruction regarding the same and should be ready to embrace the change. Gurus love it when their students understand the academic curriculum and find ways to apply it practically in real-world situations. They will have to do the same with themselves now and the best part is that students could act as catalysts in the process.

Blended learning also has the prospective to **reduce educational expenses**. People may disagree with the thought as digital infrastructure and added resources make it more expensive than traditional classroom learning. Teaching in countries like India that see a tug of war between resources and population, is like balancing on a tightrope as the challenges outnumber the rewards. Apart from the discipline that is to be executed in the classroom by conducting oneself as an example, the educator has to manage the strength as well, since the robust number of pupils in Indian classrooms is another limitation. Our Ex-President and a teacher, Mr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam mentions his experience:

I had been enjoying my time in the large, tranquil campus, working with professors and inquisitive students on research projects and teaching. The authorized strength of my class was sixty students, but during every lecture, the classroom had more than 350 students and there was no way one could control the number of participants. My purpose was to understand the aspirations of the youth, to share my experiences from national missions...When I finished, I had to answer numerous questions and my class extended from a one-hour teaching session to two hours. (9-10)

A regular Indian classroom cannot hold 350 students and the sessions cannot be that long but with an online class both issues can be resolved. Blended learning can lower costs by putting classrooms in the online space and it essentially replaces pricey textbooks, electronic devices that students often carry to class with E-textbooks, which can be accessed digitally. Online Webinars/ Faculty Development Programmes and conferences have helped in cutting the costs of organizing, travelling, hospitality, boarding and lodging, manpower and other resources. It will also lead to reduction of

human labour as blended methodologies often includes software that automatically collects student data and measures academic progress, providing teachers, students and parents detailed students' data in lesser time. Some institutions may also connect their students to industry openings by conducting online consultations which can reduce the cost of contact interviews and help in student progression and placement.

Pedagogy shall become **an archipelago of sorts for** even though blended learning is often associated with the education sector only, the opportunities and benefits of using this concept have seen a flourishing trend in all the possible fields. Apart from professional discipline/subject teachers, gym instructors, yoga trainers, dance coaches, inspirational/motivational speakers, religious and philosophical discourse presenters have all become online teachers in the present pandemic conditions. Teaching has not been the primary choice of the young in India because of the low financial remuneration that it offers but in the present times and with the benefits of liquid/blended learning it has emerged as the most worthwhile professions in the world, for it is keeping millions of people productively engaged.

Apart from evolving into varied moulds, blended learning will also cause the **extinction of specific frameworks**. It will cause an interruption in the joy of continued delivery of lecture, for the students will always expect a multi-layered lecture with technical support at all times which may not be practically possible. The already complex act of teaching will now become more multifaceted adding to the burden of the teacher, which in turn might act as a disincentive to the young generation keen on joining this noble profession. The right learning mode will always be a challenge and need-based student attention may not remain at the primary focus level. Handwriting concerns will never be an issue again! Plagiarism and credibility problems will always play a significant role in the composition of lectures and, originality of delivery and amalgamation of impromptu thoughts may take a backseat.

Scientists create something new in every few years and the accomplishments of those formations can be seen immediately but teachers have to create multiple novel intellects every single instant and the domino effects come much later. As mentioned above, many procedures will evolve and some shall wither away with time. This lockdown scenario and its intertwining with blended teaching-learning methods shall

prove to be an experimental procedure that will bring us newer paradigms of learning and teaching and those shall be everlasting too.

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