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Expanding Imagination through Audio-Visual: Application of New Technology in Teaching of English

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Days have changed and so has life. We are preparing ourselves for the post-COVID world. The new normal is emerging: caged at home but connected to the world; sitting at home but the home converted to office. The classroom has taken a new shape with new dimensions bathed in a new aura which underlines the importance of new tools for online teaching in the present scenario. The lockdown has turned out to be the unlocking of locked-up mental and imaginative powers of the modern man.

Gone are the days of the teacher-centric chalk and talk method. For motivating his students, the only driving force available to the teacher earlier was the chastising cane which he used religiously and profusely, never forgetting the motto 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' to carve gentlemen out of the 'beasts' admitted to his class. In the pre-COVID era, the teacher and the taught were largely confined to the classroom with limited pedagogic tools available to them in the form of the chalk, the blackboard and the textbook. Out of all the tools available, the one was sure-shot to work: the potent weapon, the chastising cane that could awaken the student from the deepest of slumbers even in the wee hours at 4 a.m. The 'motivated and charged' student read and rote whatever had been assigned to him by the great Master, cramming from dusk to dawn, till it was the time to rush to school. You miss a word here or a punctuation mark there, Hell will let loose upon you and there you are, dashed to the ground in front of the whole class, rather the school, since the class would be held in the open, under the trees where all eyes and all souls present on the campus were witness to the event of humanizing a beast by the great Tutor - the glorious, the noble.

It is a paradigm shift today. The need of the hour is to be prepared for the 'new normal', which requires the teacher to engage students online in a meaningful communication wherein the learner has gained endless freedom and autonomy. Sitting in his attic and sharing knowledge with his pupils through online resources, the teacher, the Guru has to play a vital role in instilling certain skills in his students. For communication and instructional purposes, it is essential for the teacher to reach out to the students and, hence, the need of online teaching. He requires instructional materials, in the form of audio, visual and audio-visual both,

[1] to drill knowledge and skill in students in a given time.

Digital literacy is the topmost priority of a teacher today. The '3 Rs' - Reading, Writing and Reciting - are to be supplemented with Realign, Restructure and Rejuvenate. The teacher, as facilitator, must be equipped with digital expertise. He must be like a supercomputer, constantly mending and improving, storing information and correcting it to surpass the limitations caused due to COVID-19. There is a need to revive and realign one's talents as well as ideas, respectively, for effective teaching. A successful teacher is one whose students eventually become more learned than himself. English teachers, in particular, will be remarkably good at using technology as they are good now at using texts to help liberate the imagination of their students.[2]

The lockdown has proved a blessing in disguise for teaching-learning; a journey from authoritarian and non-interactive instruction to network technology-based e-learning.[3] Classrooms have been classified into 4 types:

1. Traditional: In such a classroom, 0% content is shared online. Course material without online technology is shared by the teachers in a limited environment. It is a face-to-face situation in toto.

2. Web Facilitated: In such classrooms, less than 30% content is shared online. Course material is used mostly in a face-to-face situation with the occasional use of web-based technology.

3. Blended/ Hybrid: In such classrooms, most of the course material, about 80%, is shared online, with limited face-to-face interaction.

4. Online: In such classrooms, more than 80% content is shared online. There is no face-to-face teaching-learning situation.

For students beginning to learn a new language, it is essential that teaching be augmented by audio-visual aids to make it more meaningful and effective. It has been demonstrated that a topic can be taught effectively if the teacher supplements his spoken or written materials with audio-visual materials in the form of pictures, diagrams, charts, et cetera. Audio-visual aids mostly used in a classroom are audio clips of native speech, songs, sound phonemic charts, vivid images, short videos and documentaries. In teaching of English, audio-visual aids such as PowerPoints, songs, activities in Language Lab enhance the imagination of the students.

Graphic organizers help the readers visualize verbal statements. There are graphic organizers in the form of cognitive and advanced organizers, concept maps and diagrams and knowledge and story maps that help learners see visual representation of knowledge.[4] It is a clearly established fact that these aids can work wonders in English composition classes and can motivate the students immensely towards becoming proficient in the second language. In a traditional classroom, the students write only memorized essays. There is no creative writing due to the rote learning. The learner's cognitive development level remains the same. During online teaching, through the use of audio-visual aids, the learner's creativity is enhanced. It is a fact that the language is culturally constructed. With the help of technology, the culture and its language can be created and introduced in the classroom using the media, the television, the internet, social sites and other such tools. The learners are exposed to the second language in an online class with the help of multimedia pre-writing tools. They come across new ideas, issues, information, sentence structures and vocabulary when they watch, listen and experience the second language in their minds.[5]

Audio-visual aids like Suggestopedia developed by Georgie Lozanov, a Bulgarian psychiatrist educator, are very effective in teaching the second language because a comfortable and relaxing learning environment is created in the classroom,[6] which is quintessential for the enhancement of imagination, creativity and ideological evolution. Among other audio-visual aids, Skype is a very effective online tool in teaching of English poetry. It is good for teaching of English speaking and listening and rules of grammar. The teacher can give listening exercises to the students and with the help of playback periods and forecast provide opportunity to the students. Through reading poetry, the students can improve upon the fluency and pronunciation of their language. Reading poetry and literature online would be of great help. The students can see that poetry can be silly, fun and creative, too. The walls of resistance start coming down with the effective use of digital resources and students fall in love with literature.

Our society today is blessed with the trendy modern communication. Teachers are well equipped with the materials which allow the students opportunity to relive the past, visit foreign lands, hear the speeches of great men or view planets of outer space. The resourcefulness of the teacher decides the number of devices used to teach a subject. Another pedagogical tool is a literary virtual world which is a computer-based simulated environment, interpreting a literary source or text(s). It provides an opportunity for students, ranging from casual book group conversation to careful literary criticism. It may be described as a 'textual riff' which is an inviting and open forum promoting student research and creativity.[7] There is another interactive 3-D virtual world, namely Second Life, which is beneficial for teachers in acquiring digital skills

to promote educators' use of new technology. Angela Thomas, a literary researcher at the University of Tasmania, developed educational sites in Second Life such as Foul Whisperings and Strange Matters at Macbeth Island. Such sites provide a chance to the learner to have a profound understanding of the play by Shakespeare by participating as a character in the play, which leads to the enhancement of critical reading and thinking capabilities of the students. Through the use of such virtual worlds, teaching-learning acquires a new dimension, giving the learner autonomy and ideological freedom to attain new heights of human imagination and experience. Some educators feel a dire need of implementation of 'liquid curricula', though it is to be seen as risky with regards to the facilitation of effective learning and assessment strategies.[9]

The best learning takes place when the greatest number of senses are stimulated. It is affected by the audio-visual aids used by good teachers. The basis for all learning is experience. Teachers cannot give first-hand experience to the students; therefore, they resort to written and oral words. Only words cannot provide a vivid learning experience; therefore, good teachers devise methods to make learning meaningful. A device is an incentive to stimulate the pupil's curiosity and enhance his understanding through experiencing. At present, the employment of newer strategies and methods by teachers in the form of audio-visual aids is essential to improve the quality of teaching-learning.[10] They wisely use a variety of instructional devices, audio-visual materials to give real experience to students to develop their understanding. The virtual classroom enhances the imagination of the students in learning. Such experiments have been conducted and learning through audio-visuals has been advocated by earlier thinkers and educators also; Erasmus, Comenius and Rousseau, to name a few.

The digital education tools available today have given 100% autonomy to the students, changing the classroom from being teacher-centered to student-centered. They have helped in improving the administration of academic purposes. Above all, they have facilitated communication between the teacher and the learner. Such digital education tools are numerous:

1. Edmodo is useful in online dissemination of information to groups of students, evaluation of their knowledge and communication with their parents along with other functions.

2. Socrative is a wonderful tool which allows teachers to create exercises and educational games.

3. Projeqt assists users in the creation of online presentations, quizzes and interactive maps that can be shared on a variety of platforms.

1. Thinglink helps create interactive digital media with photographs, text and sounds. This can be shared on Twitter, Facebook and other social networks. It offers the possibility for teachers of creating learning methodologies that awaken the curiosity of the students through interactive content and expand their knowledge.

2. Ted-Ed is quite convenient in providing unlimited freedom to learners of various disciplines.

3. CK12 is a website for creating books and thus it lessens economic burden on the teacher and the taught. It has an open-source interface.

4. Class Dojo helps monitor students' behaviour. Students are provided with instant feedback so that a good disposition in class is rewarded with points. It is helpful in creating a receptive attitude towards the learning process among students. It provides real time notifications.

5. Edu Clipper is a convenient storehouse of online teaching material.

6. Story Bird promotes writing and reading skills using interactive and artistic books online. Such stories can be embedded in blogs, sent by email and printed, among other options. Teachers can create projects with students, give constant feedback and organize classes and grades.

7. Animoto helps in creating and sharing audiovisual instructional material.

8. Kahoot! makes online teaching lively and friendly through online quizzes, games and tests.

The challenge of online teaching and learning has been successfully dealt with by the teaching fraternity. In the world of academia, endless possibilities have been unleashed and the forces of energy, creativity, knowledge and imagination have been let loose. The new normal today has freed the learners as well as the pedagogues from the captivity of the traditional classroom and its conventional tools in its limited resources. There is no stern schoolmaster stuffing the brains of the students with his limited acquired knowledge using the obsolete tools of the blackboard, chalk, duster and of course, the cane.

With the onset of this brave new world, the fear of "spare the rod and spoil the child" has vanished. The new digital education tools, which are endlessly democratized and student-centric, have ensured more autonomy for the learner with the free flow of imagination, curiosity and enthusiasm.

The revolution has begun. Though it is premature to be prophetic about the final effects on human imagination of these new found audio-visual aids, one thing stands certain: human creativity will only tread uphill.

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