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# Opinion | Time to Move Beyond the Era of Face-to-Face Dominated Schooling

Opinion / **Published On May 25, 2020 07:38 AM /**

Staff Consortium **May 25, 2020**

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In the book *Deschooling Society*, Ivan Illich puts forward some thought-provoking perspectives as to why our traditional approaches to education are, in many ways, irrelevant, unrealistic, and unnecessary. As much as it is difficult to accept Illich's throwing out the baby with bath water suggestion, it is certainly prudent, especially now that we are faced with a disorienting dilemma, to reflect critically on our passively acquired views and beliefs regarding teaching and learning best practices in higher education.

Per the medical experts, we have been made aware that in the absence of vaccines and antivirals the only way to contain the spread of the Coronavirus is social distancing. It is therefore in our collective best interest to avoid all forms of gathering of people. Accordingly, unless it is absolutely unavoidable, routine physical presence anywhere (work, play, school...) should be

curtailed.

While some sectors in the society, due in part to the nature of work and other functions, will not be able to continue operating devoid of physical presence of individuals, institutions of higher learning should really have no problem. Why so? We have long transitioned beyond the era in which participation in learning was limited to teachers and students being physically present in a classroom. That approach to teaching and learning is consistent with the historical one-room classroom reality, a situation which warrants students (individuals needing information) to meet with the teacher (individual having the information) at a physical location. Keep in mind that back then they did not have technology to support real-time information sharing and learning interactions.

It is certainly to our advantage in this 21st century that we have technology that enables real-time sharing of information. The necessity, therefore, at the college/university level for routine/traditional face-to-face classes/meetings has long been rendered irrelevant. Considering, especially now, that such classes/meetings are inconsistent with efforts that must be taken to mitigate against transmission of a virus that poses an existential threat, there is an inescapable and urgent need to critically assess the HOW and WHY of teaching and learning practices at the college/university level.

We are living in a time when technology makes information sharing rapid, as well as uninhibited by geographical factors. Why, therefore, are we still operating consistent with the realities of the one-room classroom era? Perhaps COVID-19 is the catalyst that will trigger the actions that must be taken to truly transform educational practices. In many ways, such practices seem to be sustained solely by the comforts of tradition. All tertiary learning institutions should be virtual-learning ready, and all learning practitioners at the tertiary level should be able to facilitate learning devoid of face-to-face classroom.

Indeed, there will be learning activities (primarily in the psychomotor learning domain) that require students/trainees to be physically present. As such, I am by no means calling for total abandonment of face-to-face learning. I am instead pointing out that the passively acquired view that participation in learning equates to face-to-face attendance is at best outdated. It is a fact that many of the courses students are required to take can be delivered virtually.

Where do we go from here? As a key feature of the new normal planning for an upcoming semester, each course to be delivered should be contextually examined to determine if same really requires face-to-face attendance.

Submitted on Sunday by:

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