Education — Preparing society for the 21st century

Throughout the ages, technology has been disrupting the world order. However, the difference in the 21st century is the mind-blowing pace at which we are affected.

We revel in how artificial intelligence has changed our lives as it increases efficiency and comfort. Yet, we revile it because we are terrified at how it challenges our sense of security and worried if we are ready.

We know many jobs have been taken over by technology and nearly all jobs will have to adapt to technology.

It is imperative that education is the engine that helps society adapt to this reality. It is the role of 21st-century education to ensure that students learn competencies such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, resilience, ethics, leadership and adaptive learning.

Challenge is acknowledged when educators who were schooled in the 20th-century classroom now have to impart 21st-century skills to “digital natives”.

Teaching effectively when knowledge was the key deliverable was already challenging. It is even more challenging now to incorporate the 21st-century competencies.

In addition, the educators also have to ensure fair assessment of these abstract and subjective competencies when they evaluate their students’ progress. Therefore, building a culture of continuous professional learning among educators is essential.

Today, it is an amazing time to be educators as rapidly evolving technological tools enable them to explore and reach out to their students more effectively than ever before. However, it is not just about adding latest education technology tools to the lessons. It is about strategically integrating education technology into lessons to ensure that different 21st-century competencies are being developed in students.

It is important to note that education technology cannot replace the educator in class. It is simply a tool to enhance learning. It requires careful thought and sensible use.

In today’s education, the teachers’ most important role is as facilitators and motivators to help students push their boundaries and build competencies that prepare them to adapt to a constantly changing future.

The current generation of college students are digital natives who grew up using digital technology. This Generation Z cannot recall life without the internet and technology such as smartphones and iPads. It is important to note that although these students carry the label of being digital natives, they are generally consumers of technology for the purpose of social networking and entertainment. They are confident users of technology but many do not choose to be active content creators.

We have experienced resistance from students as they are not familiar with self-directed learning and educators playing the role of facilitators. Many students and parents are still driven by success, as defined by the previous century that focuses on the delivery of knowledge and exams.

It is vital for educators to explain the objectives of 21st-century education. This will result in responsive, adaptive students who can appreciate learning for knowledge and building important competencies for future success such as communication, collaboration, creative thinking and ethical values.

Students should be aware of their strengths and actively seek to learn or strengthen other competencies in their next steps in college or at the workplace. They should be aware that they are going to be lifelong learners where they should be able to reflect, adapt and embrace the rapidly changing world.

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Sunway College is Malaysia’s premier pre-university studies provider as it offers different Year 12 school curriculums — Australian, British, Canadian and university foundation programmes, both Monash and Sunway.

Sunway College’s students and educators benefit directly from worldwide curriculum developments that encompass the 21st-century competencies.

Australian Matriculation offers the prestigious Western Australian Year 12 programme. It is the national curriculum of Western Australia with a vision to develop confident, creative and active learners and informed citizens who contribute positively to society. It embraces the philosophy of a balanced education through delivery and assessment methods.

Australian Matriculation students are offered hundreds of subject combinations, providing them flexibility in exploring their diverse academic and career interests. Study options include non-traditional subjects such as Psychology, Politics and Law, Computer Science, Engineering Studies and Career and Enterprise.

The programme has a unique and balanced assessment structure that comprises 50% school-based assessment and 50% external examinations (administered by the Department of Education, Western Australia). The curriculum uses school-based assessment to develop skills in communication, teamwork, personal development and self-discipline. Tasks such as investigations and research create opportunities to develop creative and critical thinking skills.

The Australian Matriculation programme caters for different learning needs by delivering lessons through the blended learning approach, face-to-face classroom interactions and self-directed learning. Collaborative class work that encourages active learning is captured on electronic platforms to be reviewed at any time. Educators also prepare online lectures and e-handouts to supplement learning. They strive to stimulate students’ interests and equip them to face 21st-century challenges.
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