Independent University **Bangladesh (IUB)**

IUB Academic Repository

School of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Article

2016-09-01

Signing in the Global Classroom: The Millennials' March towards Post-Culture and Institution, and a World that is Same (?)

Tabassum, Mehnaz

Center for Pedagogy (CP) Established under the Sub-project Titled "Pedagogical Development at Undergraduate and Master's Level" (CP3357) Independent Univeristy, Bangladesh (IUB)

https://ar.iub.edu.bd/handle/11348/222

Downloaded from IUB Academic Repository

Signing in the Global Classroom: The Millennials' March towards Post-Culture and Institution, and a World that is Same (?)

Mehnaz Tabassum[79]
East West University

Pink Floyd, in their 1979 rock song, "Another Brick in the Wall", claimed that we do not need education anymore, particularly the kind that makes us just another silent, rigid and featureless brick in the wall. The song created a massive stir; questioning the necessity of education, where assumedly, the teachers are the dictators and the students, slaves. Interestingly, the Millennials seem to have marched passed that era, and now are more flexible and individualized when it comes to receiving education and reaching academic milestones. The world is still a large classroom, like it always was; except for the fact that now the Window is an illuminating smart screen instead of a real one that provides with fresh air, charming views and foods for thought! Education is now widely accessible for all, from all corners of the world. The internet is like an external hard drive for human brain, and Google is, perhaps, replacing human memory. The developed nations still search for talents from the not-so-blessed ones, and the talents simply seek a better life! The advancements and achievements seem to be a success for the Millennials, as the "culture shock" gets reduced, thanks to the concept of Globalization (or Glocalization?), and the entire world seems to be following the same syllabus, and learning the same things! Are they learning the same things? Can they? Should they? Does putting the same contents as the "developed" world make teaching and learning the same for the "developing" or "under developed" ones? Or is it simply a new form of colonizing the minds by inserting the idea that the Western education is still the one to follow? The paper, thus, intends to find out the possible answers to the questions considering the cultural concept of education as well as its global perception and acceptability. The purpose is to find out if the current connected time of ours is a Global Classroom, or just a new web of conformity and conservation. Or is it simply the time to consider Žižek's claim, that education, is indeed a lost cause? The paper will try to study the practice and representation of culture, race and socio-political issues of the Millennials' view towards education, while keeping an eye on the projected alternatives and/or atrocities.

Keywords:

My paper started with the reference to a very famous Pink Floyd song, "Another Brick in the Wall". After learning about that, someone asked me, if I was getting my muse for this research from the West only. I had to answer "no". It is because the inspiration, if that is what I am to call it, came from a very common Bengali poem, something that most of us have read or heard at least once in our childhood. It is called Òmevi Avwg QvÎÓ, (I am an Eternal Learner) by poet Sunirmal Basu. The last two stanzas are the ones we all know. The stanzas are:

বিশ্বজোড়া পাঠশালা মোর,
সবার আমি ছাত্র,
নানান ভাবে নতুন জিনিস
শিখছি দিবারাত্র।

[79] Correspondence should be addressed to Mehnaz Tabassum, E-mail: mehnaz.ts@gmail.com

এই পৃথিবীর বিরাট খাতায়,
পাঠ্য যেসব পাতায় পাতায়
শিখছি সে সব কৌতূহলে,
নেই দ্বিধা লেশমাত্র।

The stanzas roughly translate to the idea that the world itself can be the school for someone with a curious mind to know and unveil more of its mysteries. So, a person like that is a student of the universe with a never ending thirst for knowledge that surrounds him/her in the form of nature.

Now one might ask me that all the references that I am talking about are from the previous century. How do all these define the sense of millennials and their views on academic activities then? Well, these references, both from East and West, can be taken as a foreshadowing of what millennials have been experiencing now; or maybe not! We will come to this point shortly.

At this point, it is essential to clarify what or who I prefer to call "millennials". According to Oxford Dictionaries' website, the word Millennials, a noun means, *a person reaching young adulthood in the early 21st century.* That means the students, who are at the receiving end of structured education in different ages and institutions, mostly up to the basic or undergraduate levels, are mostly millennials. Now why is this important? Well, the millennials globally have seen the normalization of internet and connectivity through the advancement of technology like no other generations. They are growing up in a world that is thoroughly connected, well-documented and easily accessible from almost all its corners. The concept of being a global citizen has never been so vast and vivid before, and can never be, assumedly. The explanation to that claim is simple; the next generations would have something that can rarely be compared to their predecessors. The millennials already do everything they do with the help of technology. While it has opened possibilities of doing things that were rather challenging in the past, quite possibly, quickly and conveniently, it has also minimized the humane individual involvement in accomplishments than it was previously.

Now, let's talk about things that are still being done the same way. For example, the schools are still there, with the classes, syllabi and testing system. Students are still taught by teachers who possess expertise in the specific subject. They still have to pass certain milestones and levels in their academic life and the highest institution to receive education are still the universities, which allow people to come and attend their program from different parts of the world. The West still remains the pinnacle of academic excellence. Almost all the top ranked universities, ranked by both Eastern and Western organizations, are from Europe and North America. Students all over the world still consider these two continents to be ultimate destination for higher studies. In countries like Bangladesh, the degrees earned from universities that are geographically located in those two continents are still considered to have the most value. I believe the situation will remain like this for several more years. Previously, only the highly accomplished academicians and the financially affluent ones could usually afford to attend higher studies at globally recognized universities. While the scenario is still quite the same, there has been an emergence of a little bit middle ground involvement in there. The not-so-rich and the not-extremely-talented lot can also be able to pave their way towards the universities located in North America and Europe, by fulfilling minimum requirements. Although that number is really limited and most of the students who make it to the other countries like that, usually end up in getting day jobs than completing their education. What they could do is to build individual racial communities in the said areas, with both positive and (mostly) negative impacts among the "locals", which invite more of their countrymen to join them. This pattern also helps in minimizing the "culture shock" to some extents.

Let's get back to the classrooms once again. Today, thanks to the internet and its impeccable capability of housing endless data, anyone can learn anything they want. There are practically thousands of websites that can teach people how to cook a gourmet meal at home, to how to build a chair, or even how to survive in the wild; not to mention the destructive sides, like how to make a bomb! However, this easy accessibility of learning practically, at any time, might have boomeranged. Why and how? Well, when we have the notion that we can do anything and everything that we can think of, at any time, any place, with a minimal effort or investment, we lose our interest in learning that on our own. Now, you might object that it is not happening, and if it was true, nothing new would have been invented in the past 5 years, at least. Well, first of all, I am not talking about the people who are keeping their interest alive and moving forward to discover more. I am rather talking about the people who are consuming the benefits of internet, not particularly producing anything using that.

Yes, a lot of things changed in the last few years, but all the common mass cares about is how thin their phone is, how powerful the camera in there is or what new gadgets that are smart phone like is out there. Again, I am talking about the common people, not a selected bunch. So, when we try to "teach" these people, who have access to all the knowledge available in the world, just a click away, we face some issues, and these can vary from culture to culture, classroom to classroom. Students do not remain inattentive and mischievous in the classroom anymore, they do not do doodles on their scripts if they cannot concentrate in a class. All they do is use their phone, play Clash of Clans and other games that I am not very aware or fond of, or simply scroll down their social media newsfeed. I am not saying that it might be the topic or even the teacher who was not capable enough to draw the attention of the student. It is not as simple as that, and I am sure many, if not all, will agree with me in this. It is more than just being "bored", it is indifference. It is the concept that you can later learn it if you Google. There are also cases when students record their teachers' lecture on their phones, without asking for permission, to listen to it later. The overdependence on technology is ruining the basic curiosity of a student, like the one we can find in the poem of Sunirmal Basu mentioned previously.

The argument can be if the content, particularly the syllabi that are taught at different institutions around the world, under the tag of "international standards", is too Westernized or not. I must make it clear that I will not talk about syllabus designing and other relevant issues to teaching. My concern is at very conceptual level; about the idea behind considering the academic structure developed by the "developed" countries as the standard. Almost all the countries have their customizations when it comes to determine the content that students are taught, but when we say international, do not we actually mean following what is "European" or "North American" only? While embracing what is efficient from others to maximize our productivity is always a wise idea, but is learning similar, or something same everywhere a silent way to minimalizing the individuality? Can it be another reason that the current generation experiences minimal "culture shock" or "indifference" as well?

What concerns me more is the over-availability of "educative" and /or "instructive" how-tos that circle around the internet. The evolution of online tutorials from written instructions to video demos, and now even the live streaming surely stands for the technological advancements we have achieved. It obviously has eased so many things for us. However, making a video tutorial is probably easier than writing the instructions down. Also, there is a thin line between the makers and the consumers. There are actually no distinguished groups anymore. Most of the times, both are the same. To put it in Michel de Certeau's words, the practice, the new every day one, is where the "users", ultimately become the "producers". Some say that teaching is probably the only profession, where the teachers and the students, play the past and future for each other. Almost all the teachers were students once, and a lot of students they teach will/may become teachers someday, perhaps. This is a dejavu that they both share, which is rare in

most other professions. That very essence gets a bit disrupted when the teacher is someone who you can see online only, and is teaching you to do something, which you learn simply by copying them, dot to dot. While this practice has ways to encourage personal inputs in the thing that someone just learned how to make, most people tend to keep it to "following" only. The online version allows manipulation, too. For example, when you teach how to make a cake from the scratch, you can show how you prepare the mix, and if the cake does not turnout well, you can cut that part of the video off, and use the footage of a cake that looks perfect. No one will be able to tell the difference, nor will have a way to find out.

It is not about how the internet challenges the moral grounds of students. It is more about how the ability to "learn" from anywhere overshadows the reliability towards a real, face-to-face classroom interaction. Also, the apparent idea that everything the internet says is correct, there have been cases where the student questioned the teacher's knowledge when whatever s/he taught was different from what the internet says. In that regard, my hypotheses is that is this generation finally moving towards a post-institution era, far more advanced than what Pink Floyd asked for, which was basically against the convent schools, where students were taught to be disciplined, and were somewhat dictated by the teachers. Is change that we see now too drastic even for Pink Floyd, where the students are simply attending the colleges to earn a good grade to compete for better jobs? While we all know that education is a "service product", which enhances the quality of life for people. If people are not learning any life skills from their tenure at educational institution, and are there simply to earn a degree, would they still be interested in "investing" their time and money on institutional education? Even if they do, will they still be at the receiving end as an "eager" student to learn, or will they become demanding like a client, which already is a major concern in privately owned educational institutions? Will it be an appreciable phenomenon if the teacher has to be replaced or has to share his/her ground with internet and technology?

As a final note, I would like to mention the cultural perspective of the advancements of internet as the "teacher". Since web content is accessible by everyone from every corner of the world, it kind of projects the idea of a universal approach. It is one of the bright sides of globalization. It certainly becomes glocalization when the ideas are translated, quite literally, into local formats. For example, online schools, such as the Khan Academy, that solves academic problems as a virtual classroom online can be taken as an online alter ego of private coaching facilities that we have in our country. However, it is somewhat better than that, and is actually not violating any codes. The local adaptations usually consists changes in language, and other similar projects, like One-Minute School. While these are the positive points on our plate, the effects are far deep-rooted. To the most of us, these video makers are easily racially profiled. An Asian or South Asian person with a typical skin color and an accent would make much more believable "tutors" to the subscribers of the videos to the West, may be, whereas, in this part of the world, it is the opposite race, the Whiter one, who knows it all. This is not a racial comment; this is simply how it works! The grass still remains greener on the other side! The celebrated top-ranked universities keep looking for talented, diversified students from the "developing" part of the world, and the talented, diversified students respond to them with the hope of a better life! The millennials are at this unique juxtaposition where at one side they are assumedly minimizing the boundaries and socio-cultural differences and becoming the "global citizens"; and on the other hand, they are becoming like someone else, by sometimes, simply, mimicking them, by losing the sense of individuality. On top of that, the overreach to unlimited resources might put them in the place where they lose all interest in learning after all! I am not sure if it is a good or a bad thing, all that concerns me is where to move forward when we are in such a crossroad!

References

Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. Print.

"Sunirmal Basu Poems", *sabujsathi.wordpress.com.* 18 Jul. 2010. Web. 2 Apr 2016.

Gilmour, David. *Another Brick in the Wall*. By Roger Waters. Perf. Roger Waters, Nick Mason, Richard Wright, and Islington Green School Student Choir. Pink Floyd. Rec. 30 Nov. 1979. Bob Ezrin, David Gilmour, James Guthrie and Roger Waters, 1979. Vinyl recording.