

# RE-IMAGINING EDUCATION IN AN INDIA AT 100

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

After 34 years, India rekindled the conversation on its National Education Policy (NEP) in 2020. A policy is as good as it is actualised in practice and it would be ideal to explore the contours of national education practices leading to 2047 when politically independent India becomes 100 years old. From a teacher's perspective, the next education practices can be viewed through the following five design principles.

**Autonomy:** Currently, the clamour for autonomy in education practices is a mixed bag of pretentious idealism and hard-nosed practicality. The Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) Bill, 2017 granting autonomy to the IIMs has now become an Act. In helming a first generation IIM for two terms, one has seen no dramatic variation in the nature of autonomy of the IIMs. The reason for this is that the IIMs, as indeed the Indian Institutes of Technology, have been performing institutions with robust self-correcting systems. The greatest insurance for autonomy is excellence in students' outcomes rather than a piece of legislation. As long as institutions continue to excel, they will earn their autonomy through social, community and citizens' sanctions. Legislation may help. However, institutions and institutional leaders who are trained for blind conformity will find exercise of autonomy rather difficult even if the law is on their side. In practice, autonomy cannot be defined by entitlement nor limited by unlawful encroachment. Mere assumption of autonomy does not ensure exercise of autonomy. By 2047, autonomy has to be imbibed as an institutional culture rather than a personal perquisite of a vice chancellor, principal or a director. There will be autonomy in teaching methods, autonomy of the learner in creating her own curriculum, autonomy of thought and self-governance — *Swayttata*.

**Learning:** In 2047, six billion people in the world would constitute the middle class. With little money but with enormous hunger for learning, they will define the learner base for a networked global university system. Technology will proliferate intelligence from hardware to software to everywhere. Smart schools and smart classes may soon morph to smart chairs and smart desks. Intelligence can be embedded into everything. Smart chairs will have sensors to map the flow of attention in the classrooms. On the other hand, the intangibles of the teaching learning process such as creativity, mentorship and facilitation of learning will give birth to the quest for mastery. Teachers will evolve from ring masters to zen masters, raising awareness rather than delivering content. The four core tasks of the university: creation; dissemination; accreditation and monetisation of knowledge will require a sweet synthesis of algorithm and altruism. Learning will involve mobilisation of knowledge for a specific person; is a specific context to face specific challenges or problems. In the ultimate analysis, learning will be about propagation of crucial questions rather than pre-determined answers. Pressure of performance will have to co-exist with the pleasure and ecstasy of learning — *ananda*.

**Trans-disciplinarity:** The new National Education Policy (NEP) roots for multi-disciplinary institutions rather than standalone schools. Multidisciplinarity involves experts from different disciplines working together, each drawing on their unique disciplinary knowledge. In a world that is going to be more complex and volatile, expertise from multiple disciplines will be required to construct an understanding of the real life problems we will face. The challenges that COVID-19 has thrown before us require medical scientists, economists, historians, architects, health workers and political scientists and more experts to bring their disciplinary depth to the table. Frequent flooding of our cities is at once an urban planning issue, an engineering issue, environmental issue, public health issue, and of course a political issue that requires many diverse fields to create an understanding of the nature of the problem and its solution. However, by 2047, trans-disciplinarity rather than multi-disciplinarity will be the norm. Transdisciplinarity is

about creating a coherence of intellectual frameworks beyond the disciplinary perspectives. Knowledge in 2047 will move from discipline-based units to the unity of meaning and understanding. The reductionist knowledge of the West that explains the whole as the sum of parts will yield space to the quest for the part less whole that the *rishis* of the Upanishads described as *purnatwa*.

Technology-innovation: Technology-led innovation will take learning from cognition to immersion. The content of knowledge has evolved from text that had to be cognised to include visual, audio and tactile immersive experiences. Traditionally, students of professional courses learnt through field and factory visits. Today, it is possible for a factory experience to be simulated in a classroom. A leading global engineering company, ABB, is using virtual reality to simulate a factory experience inside a school. A classroom will not be a place but a space. In 2047, school will not be a brick and mortar house but a connecting hub that will digitally decode, deliver and disperse knowledge. Disruptive innovation will enable technology to give greater access to hitherto exclusive knowledge and fulfil unmet learner needs. A vice chancellor's office will look a lot more like a tech-studio. Technology will not be a cosmetic add-on but serve a strategic purpose. Leading schools of the world will harness talent and technology seamlessly.

Values, mindset and culture: By 2047, Indian teachers will be engaged in nurturing global mindsets based on three classical values of India: *satyam* (authenticity), *nityam* (sustainability) and *purnam* (wholeness). Mindsets will be based on how learners receive information and not what information they receive; on how to think rather than what to think. Education is finally about creating and sustaining wholesome cultures rather than serving the templates of outmoded civilisations. The post-colonial Indian education system has managed to create mindsets of clerks and coders and imitators to serve a civilisation that bets on material values of exploitation of nature and increasing consumption. While civilisation is about what we acquire, culture is concerned with who we become. The most valuable outcome of education is the becoming of a competent and compassionate human being. In 2047, a teacher's role will be to midwife this transformative re-birth of citizens of our great nation.

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