

Reinventing with the 3 Cs

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Article

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IN Shanghai last week, a group of academic, business and government leaders from 13 countries in the Asia-Pacific region were invited to deliberate on the future of education.

The inaugural regional summit to Reinvent Education for the 21st Century was supported by the Ministry of Education of China and held under the initiative of IBM's corporate community relations.

Among them was Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a well-known author and professor of business administration at Harvard University. In her keynote address, she expounded the principles of the 3Cs - concept, competence and connections—in reinventing education.

The first C is where the value of new education should be — in the realm of ideas, discoveries, inventions and innovations. In other words, instead of depending on blue-collar and white-collar workers, the future lies with those in "white coats".

They include those working in laboratories, engaged in scientific and technical endeavours, and those in the professional fields. They are regarded as new creators of knowledge to serve as the source of future wealth and prosperity.

At this point, it is imperative to underscore that education is no longer just about passive acquisition of knowledge. Education is also not merely the act of memorisation and rote-learning. This is because the regurgitation of such knowledge will add no value in the new economy.

In contrast, it must involve the formation and creation of "new" ideas and knowledge which could expand the horizon of education. This demands new skill sets adept at problem-solving and the discovery of new solutions.

It also means that the focus is more on the intangibles and abstracts as assets of the future. Alongside will be the ability to convert them into useful and practical everyday knowledge.



Rosabeth Moss Kanter says concept, competence and connections are needed to reinvent education

For this to happen, the emphasis must be on enhancing brain power, skill sets of higher levels, as well as the capacity to develop and maintain meaningful relationships.

Hence, the teaching of specific facts and figures is deemed not as important as knowing where to locate them and how to analyse and apply them.

This is where the second C becomes relevant. Competence refers to the higher order skills of harnessing the phenomenon of information explosion. Invariably, it entails acumen not just in technological literacy, but numeracy, too, especially in relation to the use of information and communication technology.

The competencies thus must not be short-term in nature. Rather, they should facilitate the process of life-long learning. It is only then that one can fully benefit from the ever-changing, information-rich world of education.

As indicated by Samuel Johnson, there are two kinds of knowledge. One is in our heads. The other is knowing where to find them. Advances in ICT have made the latter a much more powerful component in education than ever before. This makes ICT an essential tool for education of the future.

This is also why the third C is an important principle of education of tomorrow. It's not confined to technical, electronic or virtual connections and networks. Equally significant are networks of people and knowledge partners to allow knowledge to develop simultaneously.

The modern mode of productivity takes place in many places at once. Knowledge is also proliferating in many centres of excellence globally. As such, maintaining an effective and efficient network or connectivity is one of the requirements of the new education system.

This can be interpreted as going beyond the present borders and barriers in establishing international linkages as a means of exchange of ideas, knowledge and people.

Connections are also an acknowledgement of the diverse world and cultures we are in. In the new globalised world of education, learning no longer remains a parochial or insular process. It encourages the emergence of various sources of authority in knowledge-generation, working in tandem with one another.

Thus, ethics and integrity become even more vital in avoiding conflict of interest while navigating difficult cross-cultural issues. This dimension is sorely missed at present.

In summary, reinventing education at all levels is needed urgently, in keeping with the demands of the 21st century. It points to another C that over-arches everything—that is, change. The change must challenge today's tendency of doing more of the same or faster. Rather, education must be innovatively re-conceptualised.

This can only be possible if education places a high premium on yet another C—creativity.

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