Learning for Life - Building Blocks to Holistic Education

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Abstract: Robert Byrne philosophically stated, "The purpose of life is a life of purpose." The paradox of modern educational approaches lies in acquisition of means to life, than life with a meaning. It's no wonder that despite material successes, modern society finds itself in restless disquiet. While mental happiness has been found to correlate with materialistic and spiritual happiness, studies also indicate that materialistic well-being alone may not lead to spiritual happiness.

The learning principles and their pedagogical connotations have been extensively researched in literature, reported, and applied to suit learning styles and methods. Bloom's taxonomy and Kirkpatrick's model has been used with reasonable success in building and evaluating learning strategies. Yet, while the focus has remained anchored on doing things right, at times, one is left reflecting, "*Are we doing the right things?*"

Skills-gap between an academic produce and industry expectations has become a cliché. Lack of adequate professional and life skills are impacting harmony in teams, creating mistrust in intentions, affecting work-life balance, and above all, shaking ethical foundations in society. The moot question to address is, "does our educational system build good human beings?" Has an overdose of material pursuits deluged us away from wisdom of good living and holistic fulfillment?

This paper addresses lifelong learning within a holistic framework. The authors propose specific lifelong learning constructs ranging from pre-school education to retirement from active work-life. Beyond the normal precincts of workplace competencies, the authors explore life-skills that are needed to make societal pursuits worthwhile.

Through an internet-based survey, the authors identify key life-skill-gaps that grapple modern life from purposeful living, and suggest methods by which such learning content could be embedded into educational systems. The paper favors community-linked group-based learning and suggests methods to adapt current learning approaches and technologies to build holistic life-competencies for the millennial society.

Introduction

"Wisdom is not a product of schooling, but the lifelong attempt to acquire it." — Einstein

Education is the cornerstone of knowledge-based society. More so, when the quandaries of hectic-paced life, impacts harmony in society and the competitive pressures, aggravate health-threatening stresses. Life satisfaction index in fact, has been found to positively correlate with the educational development index (Bhattacharya 2010).

The Maslow's hierarchy of needs model introduced the concept of "*B-values*" that of truth, justice, order, goodness, beauty, simplicity, and unity (Maslow 1971). Most of the emphasis in current educational approaches seems to equip learners to meet the physiological and safety needs; with perhaps a sprinkling of belongingness and esteem needs. The layers that deal with the need to understand, self-actualization and transcendence remain relatively untouched (Martin and Joomis 2007).

In terms of Blooms taxonomy, the affective domain is increasingly receiving attention in recent times. This is evidenced from work on "measurement options of positive psychology" (Lopez and Snyder 2003); use of "emotional intelligence" (Goleman 1995) instruments in hiring and training, and recently self-development efforts through "Mojo" (Goldsmith 2010).

In a metaphysical sense, the universe is an expansive University which compels us to obtain an integral view of life. The universe may not confer degrees; but through life's challenging experiences, builds in us a strong will-power, enhances our ability to discriminate between right and wrong, and live life with courage, self-confidence and sacrifice. Modern educational systems can act as natural extensions of the universe to foster harmony amongst the "living kingdom,' and environment, and fill our lives with an ambition that surpasses personal achievements for societal good. Knowledge, skill and attitudes required for professional excellence and materialistic growth could be developed on the substratum of positive human virtues. Holistic education must therefore involve a "harmonious blend of the outer-world and the inner-world" (Bhatta 2007). The ancient Hindu wisdom declared holistic education through a three dimensional framework as shown in Figure 1 where, quadrant-1 belongs to the realm of mind and body; quadrant-2 embraces the heart; and quadrant-3 addresses the soul. The role of heart in the education process reflects on cultural bearings, values, feelings, and spiritual practices (Young 2003).

In recent times, efforts towards Integral Theory (Wilber 2006) on education, embracing spirituality and "new ways knowing" into education (edited by Awbrey, Dana, Miller, Robinson, Ryan, and Scott 2006) and many other studies using integrative approaches have been explored, tried, and reported. These along with progressive pedagogies such as, constructivism (von Glasersfeld 1989), learning by doing (Dewey 1916), transformative education (Mezirow 1991), lifelong learning (Fischer 1998), multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983), and ethical classroom among many others have been purposefully collaged to build effective learning ecologies.

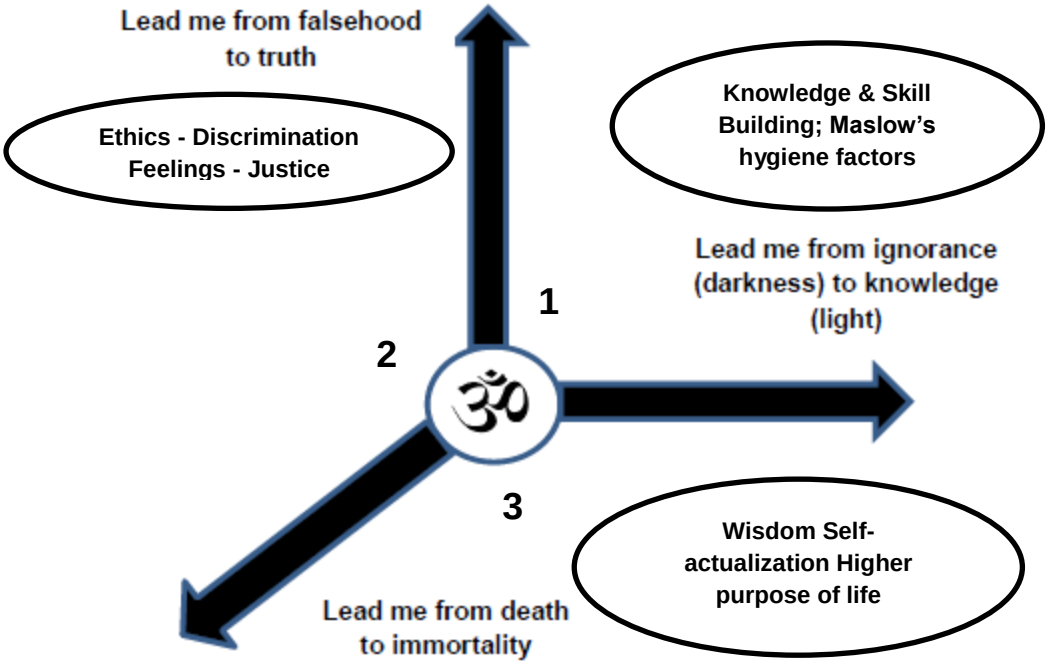


Figure 1: Holistic Education (Upanishad, Sacred Hindu Scripture)

The holistic framework in Figure 1 provides direction to an educational approach. However, operationalizing a learning structure around it requires well-defined learning outcomes and performance measures. Holistic education manifests through building of appropriate capabilities, skills, behaviors, and values consistently demonstrated by the learner, both as individual, and as team member (Hare 2006).

The competencies for lifelong and holistic learning have been discussed in numerous papers, notably in the faculty handbook (Duncan-Hewitt, Leise and Hall 2005), secular spiritual education (Bigger 2008), and holistic education (Arguelles, McCraty and Rees 2003). Figure 2 maps '*the educational grid'* where the components of holistic lifelong education viz.: academic and technical competencies; behavioral and team skills; creative skills; professional skills; emotion management; physical and mental well-being; cultivating values; 21st century skills, and spiritual well-being have been captured. It

is by no means suggested here that the entire ambit of competencies and skills fall under the purview of formal education settings; instead, what indeed is intended is to emphasize that formal education can become an enabler to develop these competency-set, within, and outside of educational campuses.

Holistic Learning

21st Century Skills	Physical and mental well-being	Values and beliefs
• Global Awareness • Information and media literacy • Environmental responsibility • Living in uncertainty • Social networking • Business, economic and financial literacy	• Body awareness and hygiene • Yoga and physical exercises • Healthy dietary habits • Healthy lifestyle • Meditation • Positive thoughts	• Identifying values • Expanding identity • Aligning with social values • Exploring beliefs • Valuing nature • Recognizing personal potential
Emotion Management	**Spiritual well-being**	**Creative Skills**
• Feeling loved • Being joyful - Laugh • Being grateful • Coping - Accepting loss • Feeling secure • Appreciating others • Acknowledging others • Responding to success • Responding to failure • Being courageous • Accepting help • Being humble	• Self-esteem • Empowerment • Equanimity at all times • Ethical • Visionary • Playful • Gratitude • Moral courage • Being trustworthy • Hearing inner voice • Purposeful excellence • Right against wrong for societal good	• Grandeur • Insight • Muse • Curiosity • Imagine • Dream • Visualize • Create • Inspire • Appreciation of aesthetics
Professional Skills	**Academic Competencies**	**Behavioral Skills**
• Prioritization and time management • Accepting change • Planning and Project management • Ownership • Quality orientation • Excellence & continuous improvement • Respecting deadlines • Client orientation • Communication skills • Commitment • Branding skills • Resource management • Negotiation skills • Conflict management	• Learn & apply knowledge • Learn & applying skills • Explore Creatively • Rigor in experimentation • Promote curiosity • Build innovative spirit • Orient towards research • Learning to learn • Deal with ambiguity • Recognize interrelationships • Explore interdependencies • Promote environmental protection • Promote reading and open discussions • Adhere to safety and professional standards • Problem solving • Reflection on ideas	• Integrity • Collaborative spirit • Community service • Accepting divergent views • Empathy • Accepting feedback • Leadership in action • Team above self • Belief in self • Accepting diversity • Maintain positive relationships • Building consensus • Respect for societal norms • Flexibility • Social maturity • Sharing - Caring • Cooperation

Figure 2: The Educational Grid – Competencies and Skills for Holistic Lifelong Education

The authors also opine that a significant paradigm shift must occur in modern education focusing on the '*joy of living*' as its ultimate outcome. Only a joyous-being can trigger subsidiary outcomes such as positivity in thought, endearing creativity, richness in thought-word-deed, abundance in generosity,

productivity at work, effective team player, passionate learners and workers, and excellence in application of knowledge, skills, and competencies for the universal good. True education ought to be transformative.

The need for transformative education from a purely materialistic perspective to higher echelons of life is no longer a choice. The World Health Organization projects *depression* as major factor for disability, after cardiovascular disease. The perceived decline of moral values in society and the increasing need for environmental ethics (Light and Rolston 2003), points to an urgent need to reinforce ethical education, and for society to transparently demonstrate moral values in everyday lives.

The Problem Statement

The underlying theme and propositions covered in this paper are shown in Figure 3. The results from an internet survey conducted by the authors in May 2011 have been used as the basis for the development of the proposed holistic learning framework. The paper attempts to link the educational value chain from "*where we are*" to "*where we could be.*" Specific learning constructs have been proposed that encompass lifelong learning framework. The authors also identify current skill-gaps in workforce and suggest ways to bridge them by leveraging on the strengths of millennial.

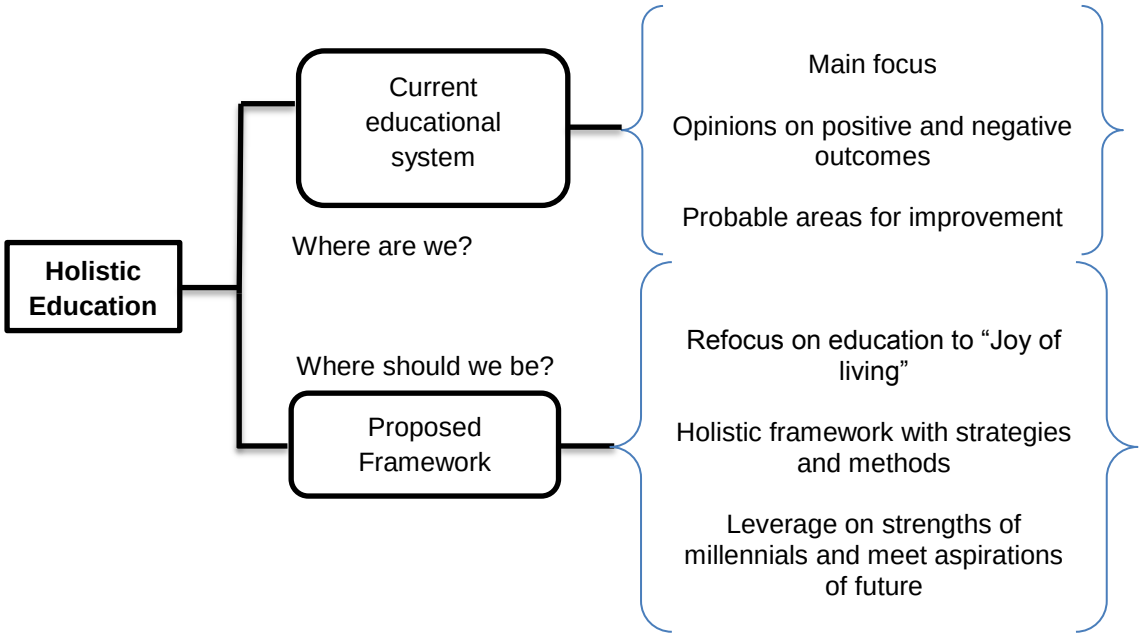


Figure 3: Theme and Outline of the Paper

Current Educational System – Where are we?

The focus of current educational system caters to the *hygiene factors of life* (quadrant-1 of Figure 1). A quick survey of reported studies and blogs reiterate that the focus of our educational system is mainly oriented towards attainment of academic knowledge with somewhat limited technical skills, as permitted within available resources. The performance reflected by '*end-of-the-course grades*' becomes sacrosanct to success, and often becomes a filter for separating the *good* from '*not so good*' students. Achievement of "high-academic-grade" seems to automatically translate as *preference in employment* with reasonable assurance of economic security. In this context, Krishnamurti said, success-oriented education is also fear-oriented education (quoted by McAuley 2008).

The conventional approaches to education employ the paradigm of '*social acceptability*' and *'individual conditioning*' as norm. These apparently impact the ability of individuals to think independently. Foucault (1985) observes "there are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all." A human being in fact, exercises two instruments, that of knowledge which enables acquisition of technical skills, and that of intelligence which enables observation and discovering the self (Krishnamurti 1974).

Overlaying emphasis on university degrees and academic qualifications, than, on the attainment of rational, emotional and spiritual intelligence, can lead to a discordant selfish societies, where personal interests override social gains. In organizational context, these factors can affect harmony and growth at workplace. Not surprisingly therefore, there is a global cry on *skills-gap* between academia produce and industry needs. The global theme on skills-gap converges across geographical divides and cultures, and increasing proportion of university graduates are found lacking in technical, professional and behavioral skills as numerous studies and surveys consistently show: Employability skills (Juhdi, Jauhariah and Yunus 2007); Graduate employability (Archer and Davison 2008); Skills-gap survey (The Higher Education Forum 2010); The Skills Gap (America's Edge 2010); Bridging the Skills Gap (Galagan 2010); Across the Great Divide (Bridgeland, Milano and Rosenblum 2011).

Figure 4 captures the current focus of education vis-à-vis the skills-gap reported by employers and end-users of educated workforce.

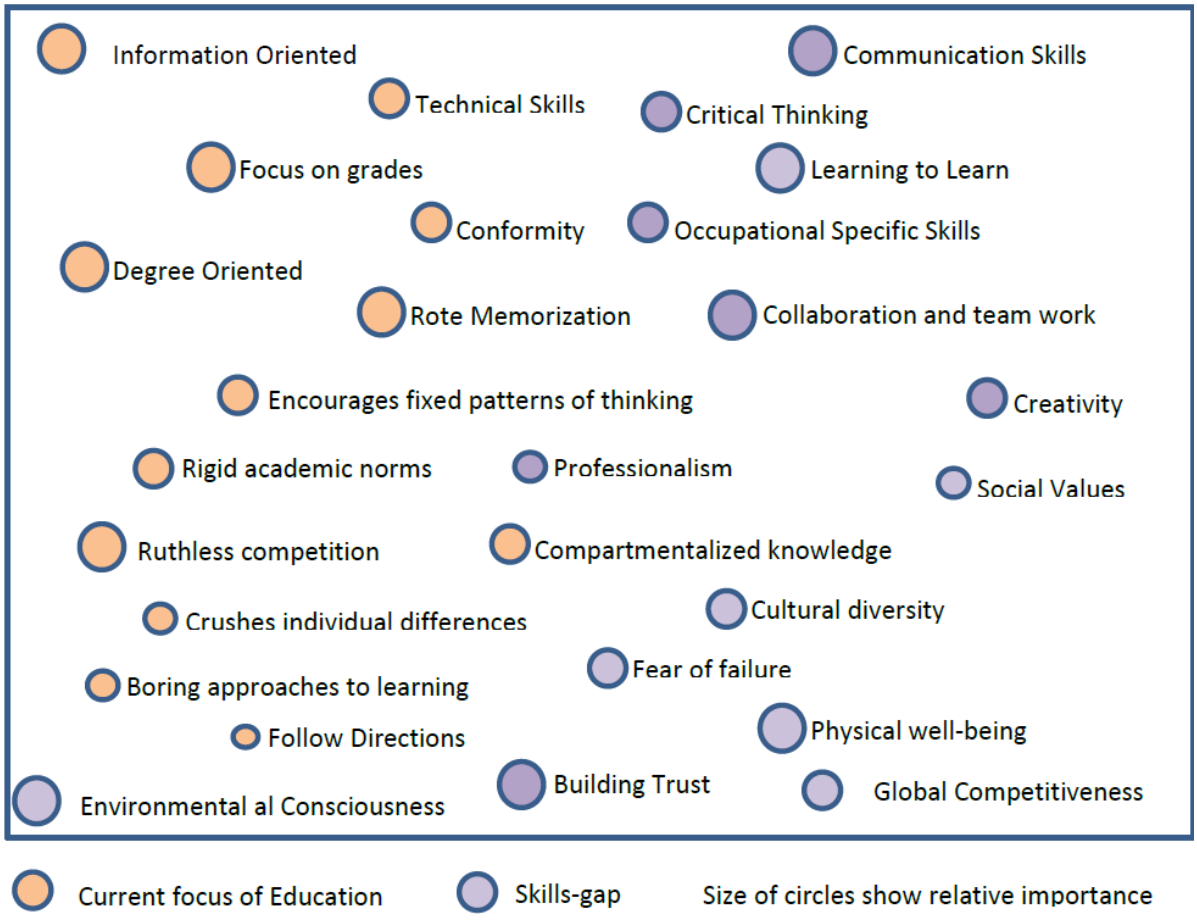


Figure 4: Current Focus of Education and Resultant Skills-gap

In the context of educational focus and skills-gap, quadrants 2 and 3 of Figure 1 must not be seen as watertight segments, but instead, viewed as a composite whole of an integrated holistic education. It should be recognized that future talent development requires both formal and informal approaches to learning. In this context lifelong learning (Bremner 2010, Bennet 2008), just-in-time-learning, eLearning (Taylor 2010), blended-learning, using adult learning methods (Collins 2004) become a significant enabler to building talent pipeline for future workplaces. The future learning ecology needs suitable adaptation to the strengths of millennials, who would be our future learners, which includes, 24x7 social connectivity, technology savvy, media agnostic, multitasking, and informally flexible life-styles (Prensky 2001). Prensky candidly observes, "the single biggest problem facing education today is that our current teachers, speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), and are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language.

In terms of information-centered versus transformation-centered education, and learner-centric versus teacher-centric, the learning facilitation grids shown in Figure 5 clarifies relative paradigm positions. The framework for holistic lifelong learning proposed in this paper seeks to achieve "purpose with growth" using blended learning models.

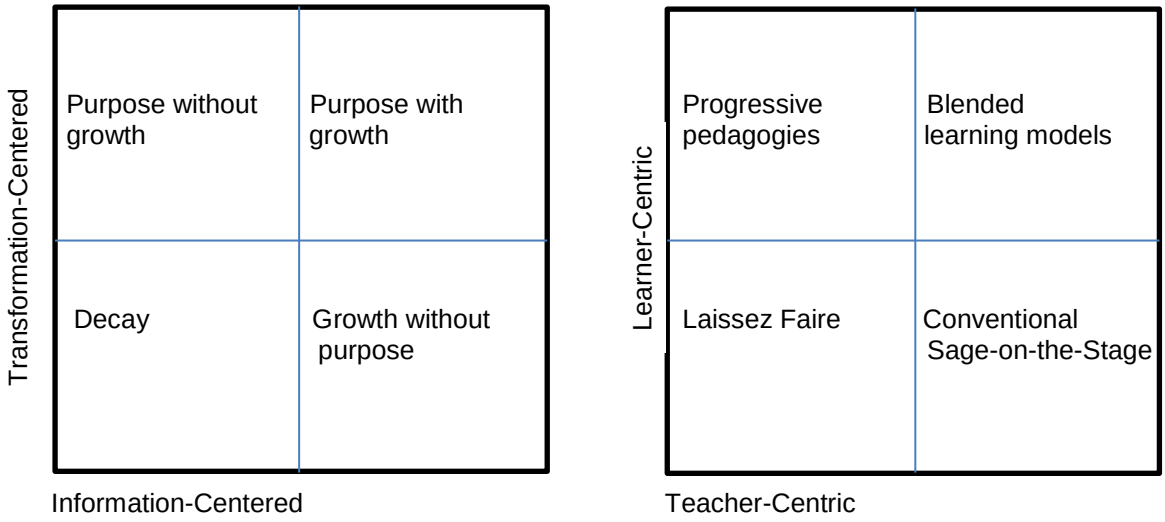


Figure 5: Learning Facilitation Grid

Survey on Goals and Methods of Education

A short internet-based survey was conducted by the authors in May 2011 to seek the respondents' opinion and feedback on the goals and methods of education, as currently is, and what should be in future. The broad aspects covered in the survey are shown in Table 1.

The respondents were contacted through Internet, LinkedIn and Facebook, mostly from the authors' professional groups comprising executives, teachers, trainers and students. 108 persons took the survey, of which 6 had partially completed their responses, and therefore, discarded from analysis.

Table 1: Survey on Goals and Methods of Education

Opinions sought in the Survey	Range of choices
What should be the goals of education? (Respondents were asked to rank from most important to least important)	• Dissemination of knowledge • Building skills for societal growth • Economic empowerment • Preparing researchers for knowledge and technology advancement • Unleashing true potential of self • Self-realization and spiritual growth • Preserving environment and social order
What should be the emphasis of education? (Respondents were asked to rank from most important to least important)	• Learning to be (Interpretative skills) • Learning to know (Cognitive skills) • Learning to do (Resolute skills) • Learning to live together (Relational skills)
What aspects (of those listed alongside) does our current educational system encourage learners to do? (Respondents were asked to rank from always to hardly ever)	• Think differently • Question everything • Find their passions and follow them • Explore technology and knowledge • Work together and share experiences • Empathize and help community building • Be creative and inquisitive

What beliefs (from those listed alongside) does our educational system continually reinforce? (Respondents were asked to rank from most agree to least agree)	• Good grades guarantees success in life • Inspire learners to follow their passions • Unfold learner's potential • Help learners to discover purpose of life and what they want to be • Create authentic relationships with people and environment
Opinions sought in the Survey	Range of choices
What amongst the choices alongside does our educational system promote? (Respondents were asked to rank from highest evidence to least evidence)	• Skill-based competence • Social-based competence • Self-esteem and well-being • Healthy positive attitude • Cultural diversity • Confidence to face uncertainty • Exploration and investigation • Experimentation • Imagination • Rigor and discipline
What amongst the choices alongside should our educational system support? (Respondents were asked to rank from most significantly to least significantly)	• Connect life experiences with learning • Involve learners as active participants • Design programs to help participants reach their goals. • Show learners how learning will benefit them • Provide opportunities for sharing of experiences, questions, and exercises with peers • Accommodate different learning styles by offering a variety of training methods • Reinforce learning through timely feedback and reflection
What amongst the strategies listed alongside does our educational system use? (Respondents were asked to rank from strongly agree to strongly disagree)	• Use input from peers to identify learning needs • Keep a personal portfolio and record learning events • Seek feedback on performance from others • Teach others • Keep a to-learn list • Always have something to read • Participate in research • Actively participate in local and national organizations • Actively participate in local multidisciplinary conferences • Audit performance and improve performance through self-correction
• The respondents were asked to rank the effectiveness of current educational system from amongst five choices in the Likert scale (average being the center choice) • The respondents also made one suggestion to improve the educational system	

Seven of the survey questions were of ranking type, where respondents were forced to exercise one-choice over the other. The questionnaire was so designed to obtain positive dispersion from amongst tight and similar choices. In most cases, all attributes indicated as alternatives in the survey questions must actually be seen as desirable constituents of lifelong holistic education; yet, ranking amongst these attributes have been sought only to identify *key priority components* in education. Therefore, readers are advised that whilst reading the survey indicators, even those ranked as low focus areas, does not in any way mean that they are insignificant. In fact, they still remain very essential and significant constituents of a transformative educational system, albeit a bit lower in priority from the respondents' point of view.

Seventy percent of the sample polled opined that the current educational system is only averagely effective; and another twenty-one percent gave below-average effectiveness rating. This only reinforces our view that skills-gap and near-absence of life-skills orientation in our educational system is a hard reality which needs urgent intervention. Amongst the significant changes that respondents sought in educational system are: introduction of experiential, skill-based learning with orientation towards collaborative work; social values; spiritual foundations to the purpose of life; and above all, build an attitude of learning to learn with joy and fun. Figure 6 shows the 'word-scatter' of major changes that respondents would like to see in our educational system.

Figure 6: Goals of Education

The survey respondents considered dissemination of knowledge and unleashing the true potential of self as the most significant goals of education. The other preferences that respondents gave for goals of education are shown in Figure 7.

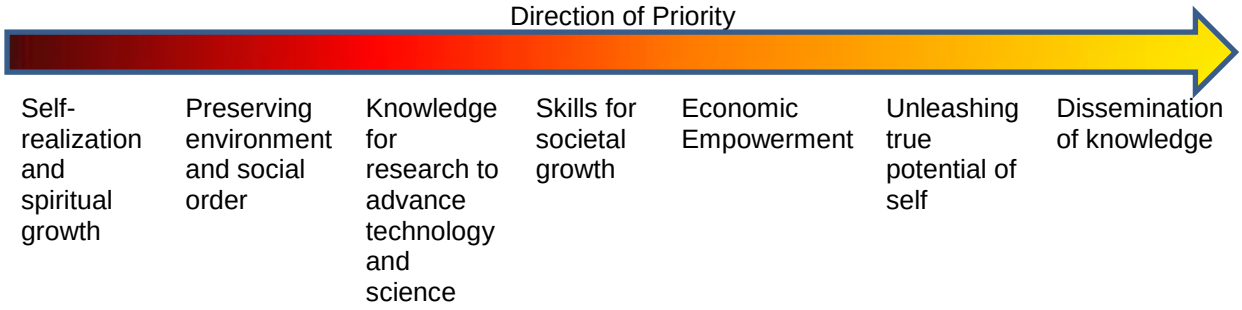


Figure 7: Priorities to Accomplish the Goals of Education

The respondents opined that the emphasis of education must be more on practice using the *learning by doing* pedagogy. The priority for selecting suitable strategies for the development of learning components as obtained from the survey is shown in Figure 8.

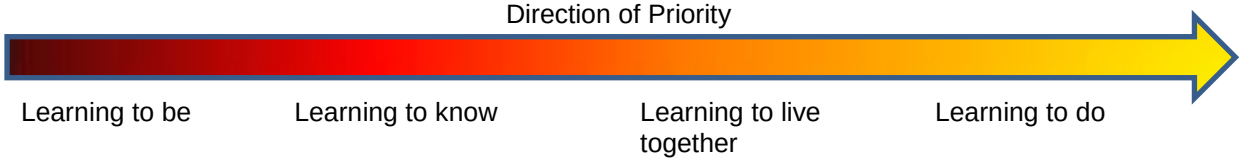


Figure 8: Strategies to Select Appropriate Learning Components

Specific operational components that can be used to build effective and robust educational system were also studied through the survey. Learning methods such as teaching others and obtaining inputs from peers to refine learning needs found more preference amongst the respondents. Self-correction

through audited performance and maintaining a personal portfolio to record learning events received lower importance. The priority preference exercised by respondents for choosing operational components of learning strategy is shown in Figure 9.

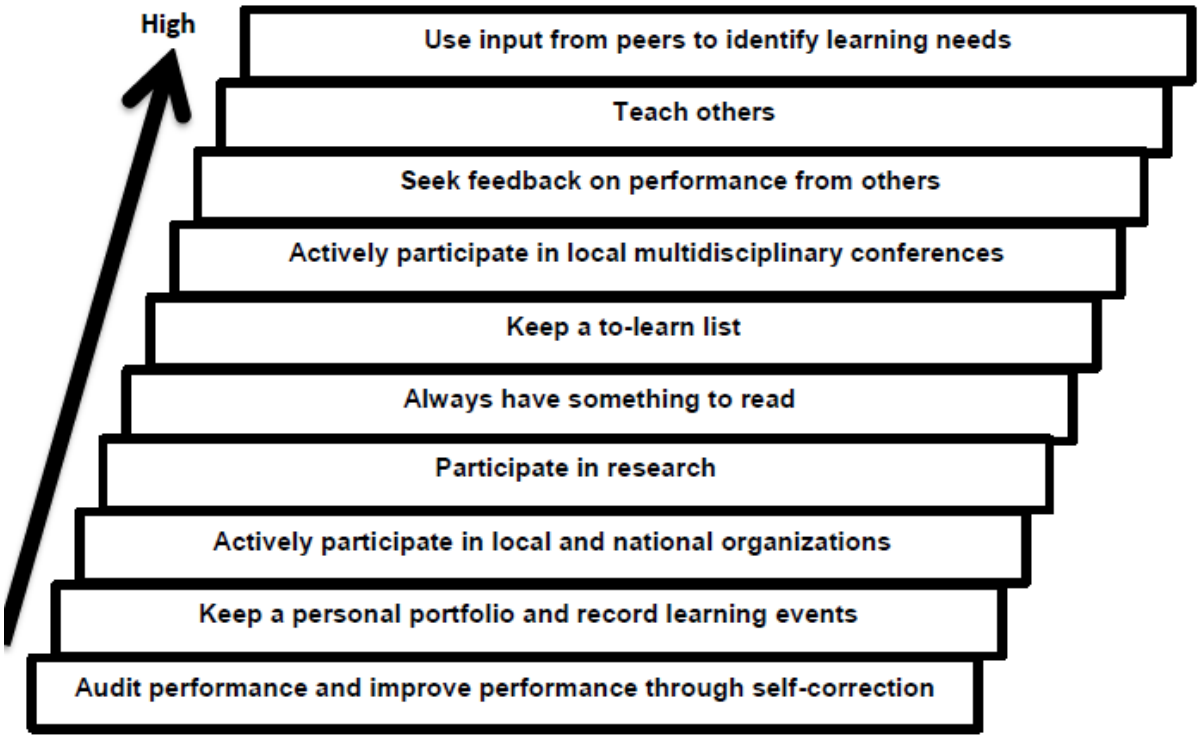


Figure 9: Operational Components to Build Learning Strategies

The authors opine that it would be unfair if some of the positive aspects of current educational system are not brought to the fore. The survey therefore analyzed the strengths of our educational system which provide broad relative indications than absolute truths.

Our current educational system overemphasizes achievement of good grades and scores, whereas, discovering the true purpose of life, and help learners to know what they really want to be, gets very little attention. Overemphasis on grades breeds competition, which often leads to *fear* of accomplishment and consequential stresses that adversely affects well-being (Kohn 1999). Creating authentic relationships with people and environment also receives little emphasis. The survey reveals that our educational system reinforces certain beliefs over others, which from the standpoint of holistic lifelong learning are very significant. Figure 10 shows the preferences of respondents with regard to beliefs reinforced by current educational approaches.

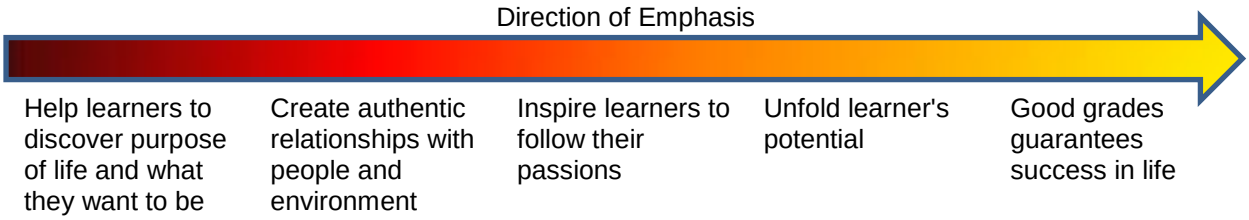


Figure 10: Beliefs of Current Educational System

What kind of attributes does our educational system nurture? The respondents felt that our educational approaches being more knowledge-driven, is biased towards exploring technology and knowledge. They opined that system does not encourage students to think differently, and creatively. Learning is conditioned to rigid structures and syllabi. Neither, is the emphasis of education towards community building and empathy is high. Figure 11 shows the survey results with regard to the attributes that our educational system nurtures and encourages.

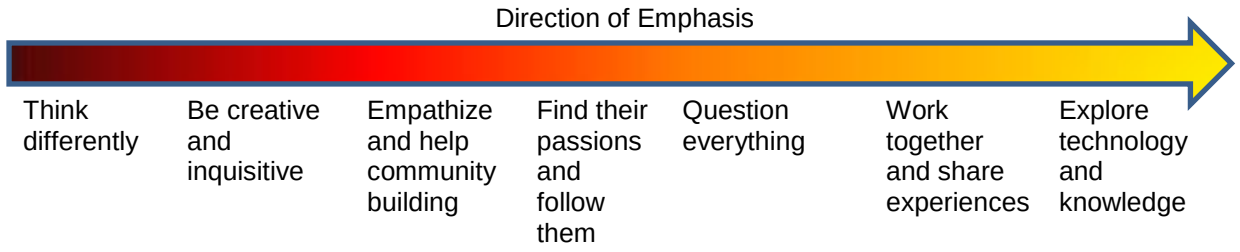


Figure 11: Emphasis of Current Educational System

The other facets of our educational system appear to favor skill-based competencies delivered with rigor and discipline than helping students to build confidence to face uncertainties in life. The respondents also underscored the point that social-based competencies and allowing imagination to flow do not find much emphasis in our academic curriculum and learning methods. Figure 12 shows the attributes that current educational approaches support.

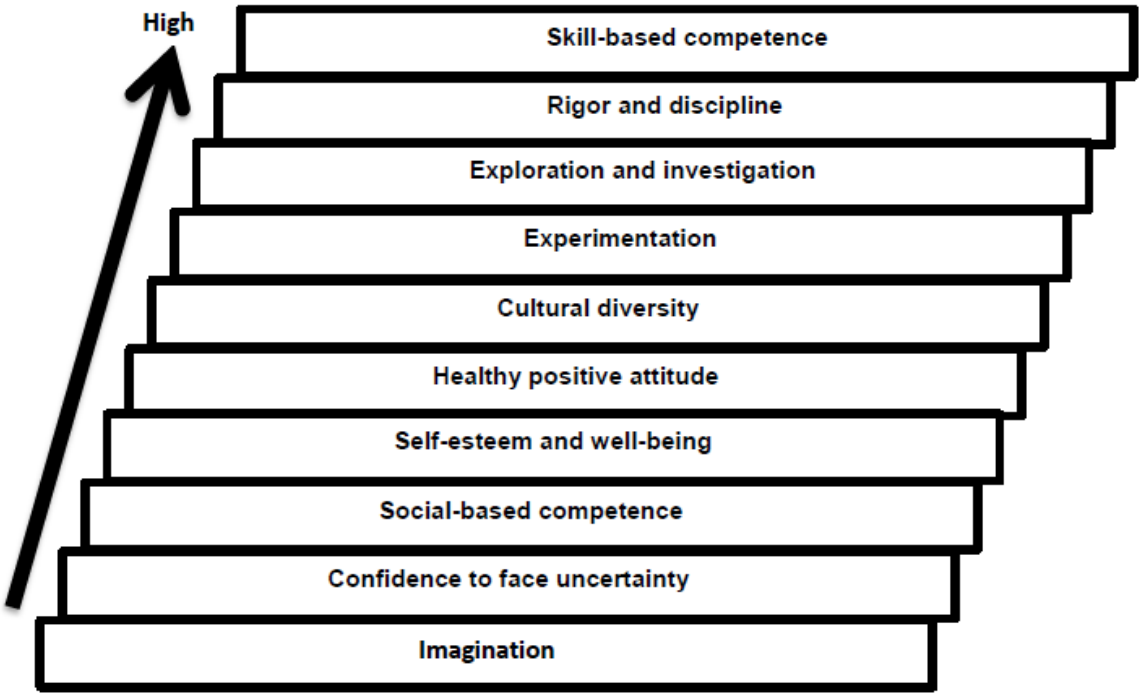


Figure 12: Attributes that Current Educational System Support

In terms of the desirable attributes that educational approaches should actively pursue, respondents opined that learning should be connected with life experiences and built around an atmosphere of sharing and collaboration. Blended learning has been favored. Figure 13 shows the preferences of respondents with regard to desirable attributes in educational systems.

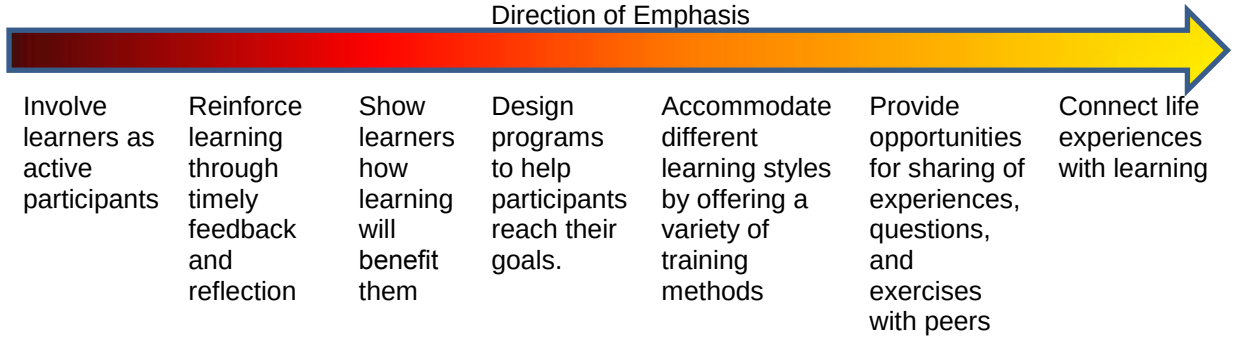


Figure 13: Desirable Attributes in Educational System

Superimposing quadrants 1 to 3 of Figure 1 which defined the holistic lifelong education model with the indicators obtained from the survey, a holistic learning grid can be constructed that maps the learning intent, strategy and attributes as shown in Figure 14.

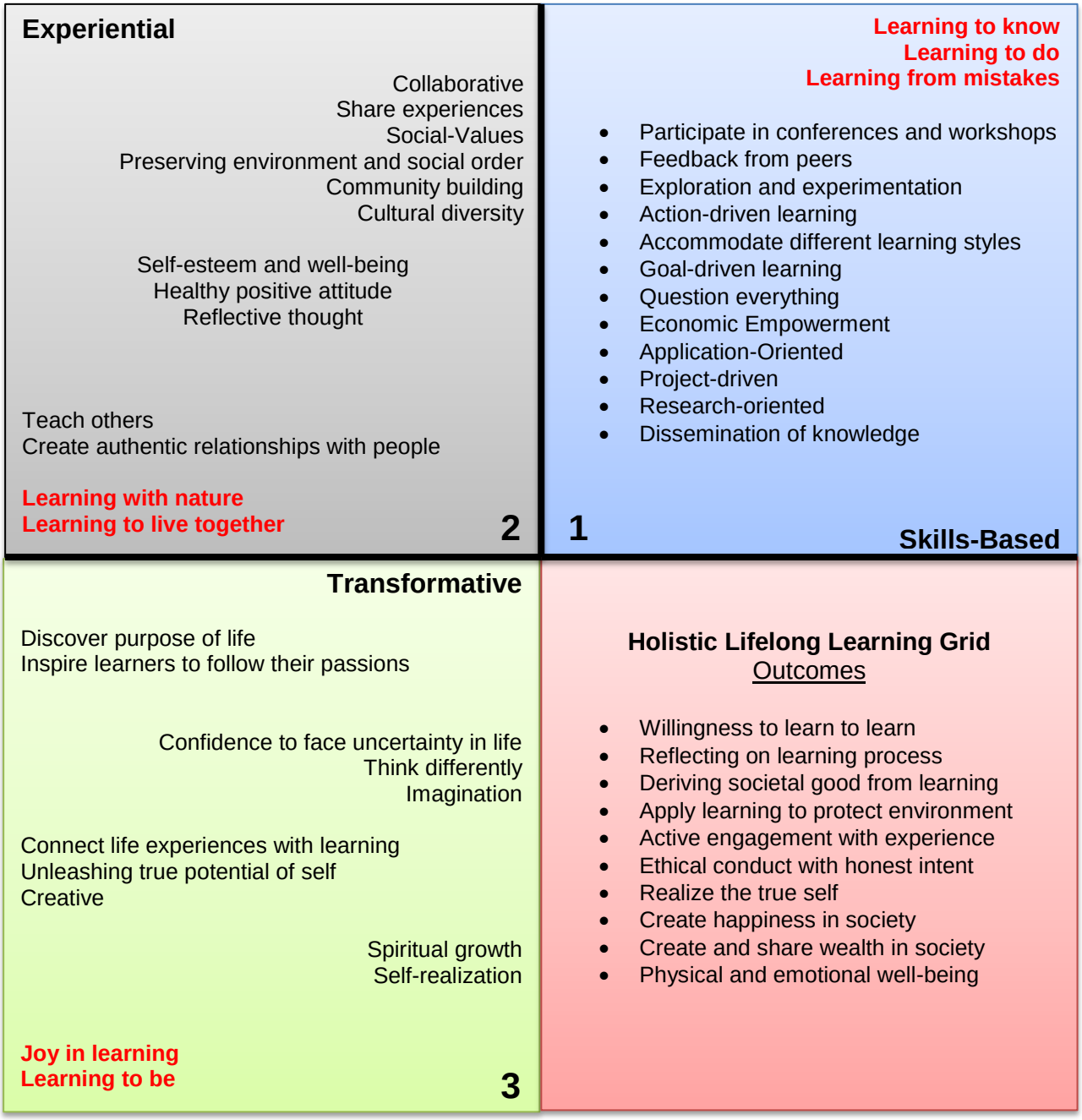
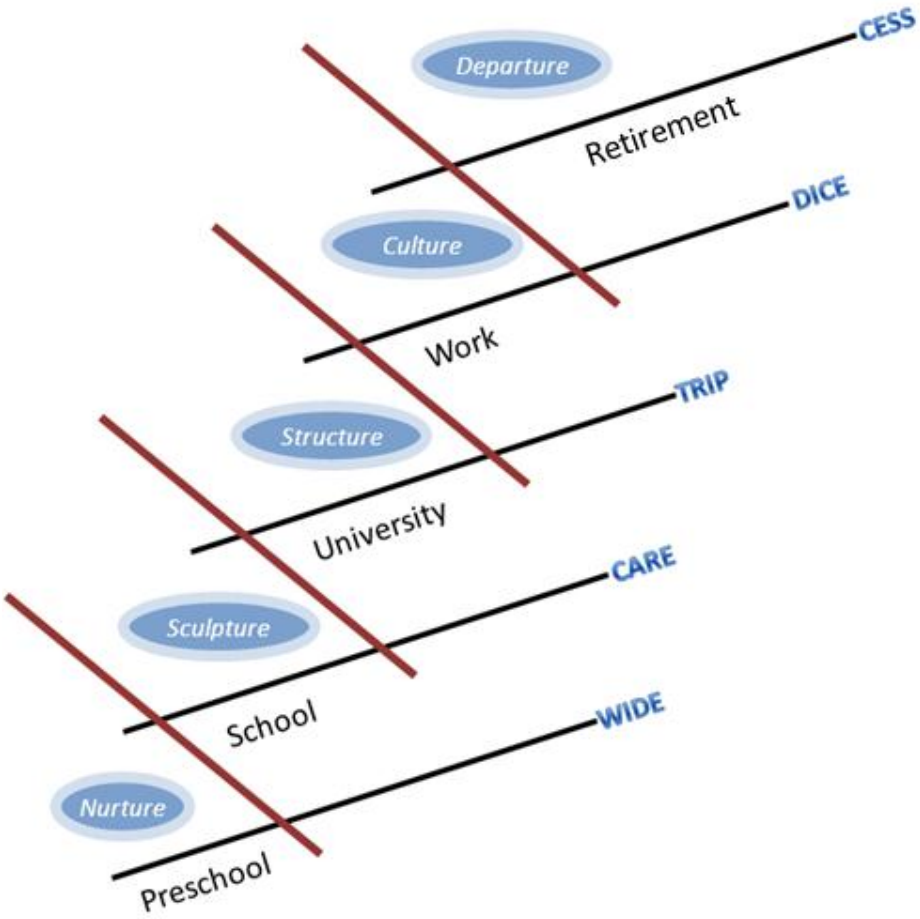


Figure 14: Holistic Lifelong Learning Grid

Proposed Holistic Lifelong Learning Framework

Learning is a lifelong continuum. Viewing learning interventions at kindergarten, school, university, workplace, and post-retirement life, as one holistic transformation, is the key to human capital development and satisfaction in life.

The authors present a holistic lifelong learning framework that comprehensively captures the stages, and strategies, in the learning value-chain. Figure 15 depicts the framework which offers seamless evolution of learning percepts covering the paradigms, *Nurture – Sculpture – Structure – Culture – Departure*.



Stages	Focus	Drivers for Holistic Lifelong Learning			
Nurture	**WIDE**	**W**:Wow	**I**:Inquiry	**D**:Discovery	**E**:Exploratory
Sculpture	**CARE**	**C**:Creative	**A**:Analytical	**R**:Reflective	**E**:Experiential
Structure	**TRIP**	**T**:Team-based	**R**:Research	**I**:Integrative	**P**:Projects
Culture	**DICE**	**D**: Diverse	**I**: Innovative	**C**:Collaborative	**E:**Entrepreneurial
Departure	**CESS**	**C**:Consultative	**E**:Ethical	**S**: Social	**S**: Security

Figure 15: Holistic Lifelong Learning Framework

At the preschool level, learning must revolve around *nurturing*. A child's growth must be filled with wonderment! Learning pedagogy must promote WOW, Inquiry, Discovery and Exploratory percepts. A child must be encouraged to grow accepting their uniqueness of existence without undue societal judgmental overlap.

At school level, a child's growth needs to be molded and *sculpted*. The pedagogical focus should encourage creativity, amalgamating with curiosity and a questioning analytical temper. Opportunities must be provided to reflect upon the how's and why's, and learning must be deeply rooted into practice and experience.

At University level, teenager adolescents need guided *structuring*. The pedagogical shift must be woven around collaborative team-based activities, encompassing opportunities to research on a wide array of subjects. Participants should be able to appreciate and visualize a unified underlying theme amongst nature's diverse manifestations. Learners should be able to compare and contrast, to obtain an integrative outlook reinforced with experiential learning through project based activities.

At work, an adult's behavior must truly reflect matured tolerance, constructive balanced views thriving in a global *cultural* fabric. Learning at work should be based upon adult-to-adult interactions, where diverse viewpoints are heard, debated, analyzed and innovative "out-of-the-box thinking" approaches

must be promoted. At workplace, collaboration with large teams in an invigorating entrepreneurial spirit holds the key.

Post-Working life is the stage of *departure*, where learning must become contemplative, and largely society oriented. Learning at this phase of life should be linked with consultative and advisory roles, spun around ethical, social and security considerations.

Each stage of this naturally evolving progression must delve on how to learn, and the use of right tools in assimilating, internalizing, impacting thought, behaviors and outcomes. Each of these stages has a key focus, indicated with an acronym: WIDE-CARE-TRIP-DICE-CESS translating into 20 cardinal learning drivers presented in the framework.

Millennial Centric Learning

Learning ecology must absorb societal changes and needs of the future. The methods and processes that sustained educational systems in the past need not automatically translate as success factors in future. In this context, the holistic learning framework elucidated in this paper must be aligned to leverage the strengths of the millennial.

The millennial generation breeds in a networked world with real time connectivity. Cellular phones and laptop have become a necessity. The millennial are more exposed to the world through Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube, than face-to-face. Their connections to the outer world are without much constraint. To the millennial, life is a rush; multi-tasking; on the move; and restlessly hectic (Shekhar 2011). Their feelings are expressed in smileys, and communications encapsulated in Three-Letter-Acronyms.

To the millennial an instructor-led, chalk-and-talk pedagogy may spell boredom. Group driven tasks over social networks, wikis and blogs suits them better. They would prefer flexibility in learning curriculum that empowers learners to become an integral part of educational system from design to delivery. Learning must necessarily be fun for them. The salient strengths of millennial which should be factored in learning design, methods and delivery are presented in Figure 16.

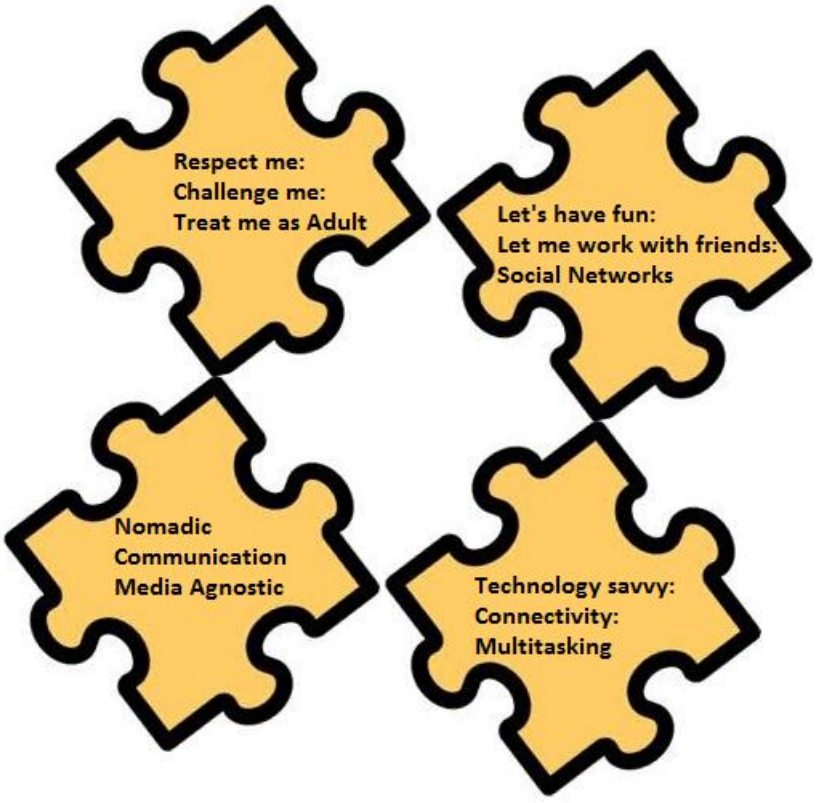


Figure 16: Strengths of Millennial Generation

Learning styles that could effectively leverage the strengths of the millennial and engage them purposefully have been depicted in Figure 17. Holistic lifelong learning approaches must make efforts to use these techniques in curriculum design and delivery.

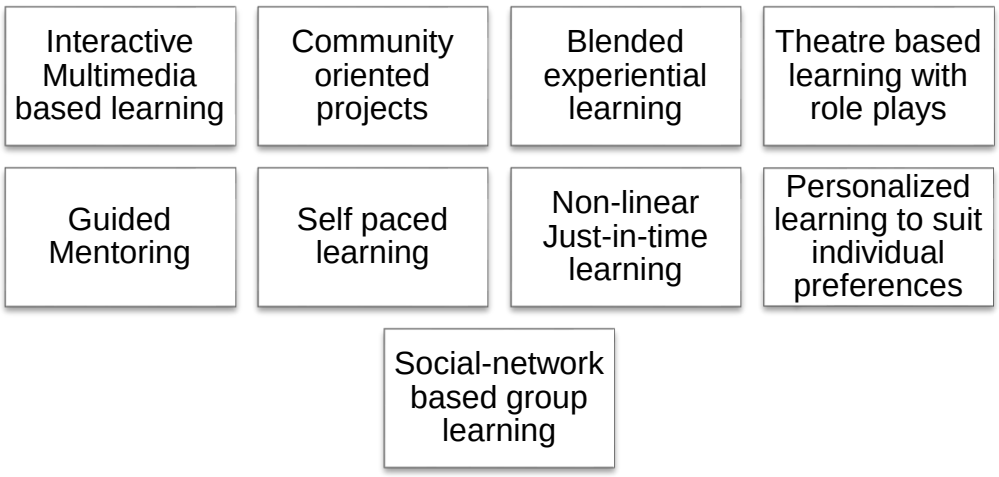


Figure 17: Learning Styles for Millennial

Conclusions

Our current educational system requires *holistic transplant* that addresses the core purpose of human life. Whilst the current thrust of education focuses largely on knowledge advancements and building workplace competencies, it does not encourage learners to explore their potentials to the fullest extent, nor build adequate life skills to manage and transform their lives to create happy societies. The survey analysis presented in this paper provides broad indicators of deficient attributes in current educational approaches.

The knowledge economy of today demands creative and innovative solutions to the challenges faced by society. The global citizens of future require much more environmental and cultural sensitivity than ever before. Societal growth can no longer be measured by material prosperity alone; it needs to factor ethical values, harmony and happiness as a composite currency of growth. Value-based holistic education is the need of the day.

The authors recommend holistic lifelong learning and creating an environment that fosters life's context as essential drivers for talent building. The holistic lifelong learning framework presented in this paper provides for a seamless transition of learning methods from pre-school education to retirement with clearly defined pedagogical drivers Sathya Sai Baba, the spiritual leader of India often said, "True education is not taught, but caught."

Are we ready to change our learning ecology to meet the challenges of the millennial? That's the moot question.

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