8ᵗʰ ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARC8)

Outlook 2030: Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe

ARC8 EG1 Inclusive Learning and Teaching in a Digital World

Session 1 | Thursday, 17 December 2020

Memo

Presentation by Ms Marcela CHAVEZ OCAMPO, Vice President of the Erasmus Mundus Student and Alumni Association (EMA)

Marcela was asked to make a 10-minute presentation focusing on the following 3 questions to provide food for thought for the expert group:

1. What is your take, how inclusive are learning and teaching in the digital world? what is the status quo? Do you have any numbers to show?
2. What potential risks do you foresee that could jeopardize greater inclusion in learning and teaching in a digital world in the next 10 years?
3. What opportunities and leverage points do you see to promote inclusion in learning and teaching in a digital world the next 10 years?

Marcela started her presentation with a global overview of issues related to the topic of the Expert Group: inclusive digital learning and teaching. Judging by the number of internet users which equals 60% penetration, and the number of mobile phone users which equals 67% penetration among the population (Source: Digital 2020 Report), we can already make an assumption on the lack of access to digital education. Those with access to internet however spend considerable amount of time on the internet, almost 7 hours a day on average, and it is also worthy to take a look at the speed difference of internet on different devices.

COVID-19 has boosted the number of online meeting software users, many universities have moved their classes online using Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet. The Times Higher Education (THE) Leaders Survey has reported that 53% of universities had moved 100% of their classes online, and 33% reported a 75% online transition. Another interesting finding of this survey has been that 49% of the universities will not give discounts on tuition fees to compensate their students for the disruption of their learning.
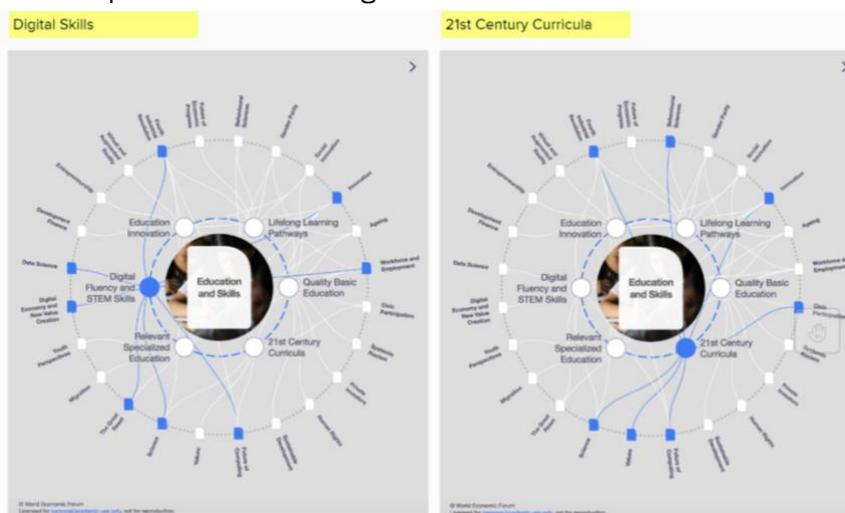
Regarding the global education trends and skills, the World Economic Forum identified the top Digital Skills (innovation, workforce and employment, future of computing, science, The Great Reset, digital economy and new value creation, data science, fourth industrial revolution). However, these only partially cover the 21st Century Curricula skills (behavioural sciences, innovation, civic participation, future of computing, values, science, fourth industrial revolution). These have nothing to do with what we are currently universities teaching their students.
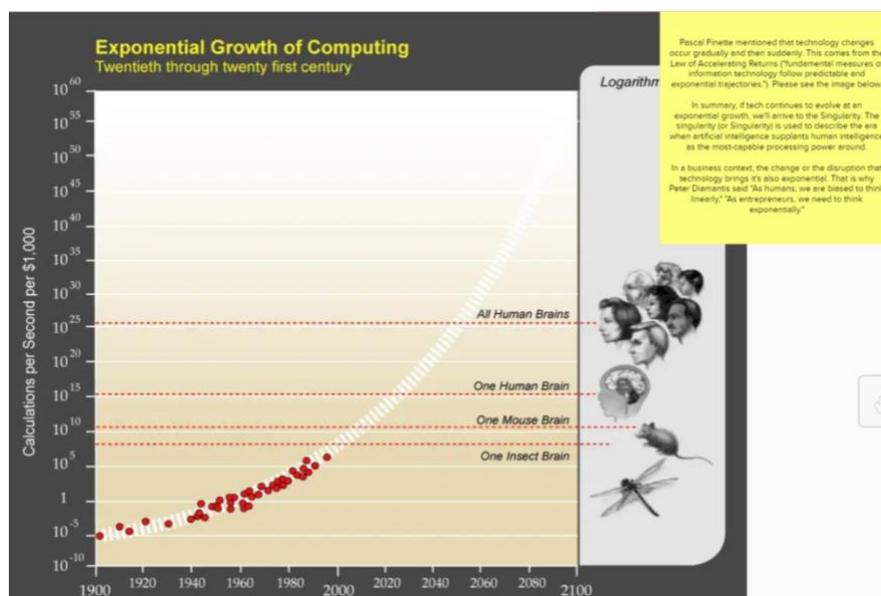
People are also not aware of the exponential growth of computer technologies and all the topics related to exponential thinking. Technology changes occur gradually and then suddenly they accelerate, and the curve becomes really steep. If technology continues to evolve at an exponential growth, we will arrive to the Singularity. The Singularity is used to describe the are when artificial intelligence supplants human intelligence as the most capable processing power. This will result in many disruptions including business, and universities should prepare students for this, as it will affect every career.

Following this overview Marcela proceeded to share her thoughts on **potential risks that could jeopardise greater inclusion effort in the next decade**. She summarised her thought around the following key points:

- Digital divide: While learners are showing great resilience, the digital gap dramatically exacerbated by the pandemic effects, people in rural areas mainly don't have access to technology.

- Cost of Education: Students might not want to pay the same for an online programme than for an in-person one. Universities are not willing to lower tuition fees.

- Remote work: During the pandemic many people decided to move out of the cities and work remotely from the rural areas. Internet access still needs to be solved and online education will continue.

- Abundance of choices: Students can apply for university in any country, or learn from any resource on the internet (MOOCs, YouTube), platforms in other industries (Netflix, Spotify)

- Exponential technologies and exponential thinking: Universities fail to teach their students how to think exponentially. In the era of exponential disruption, the most dangerous thing to do is what you did yesterday. Case studies become more and more irrelevant as we start moving towards the future, that does not have the same set of rules. Moving out from competition to a collaboration of abundance, where things are becoming free.

- Skills mismatch: Between university graduates an the needs of employers in most eocnomies. Without adequate modifications to education and training systems, this gap between supply and demand is projected to grow significantly.

- Digital Fatigue
- Lack of social interaction with classmates

Regarding the **opportunities or leverage points that could lead to greater inclusion in digital learning and teaching in the next decade**, Marcela shared the following thoughts with the expert group.
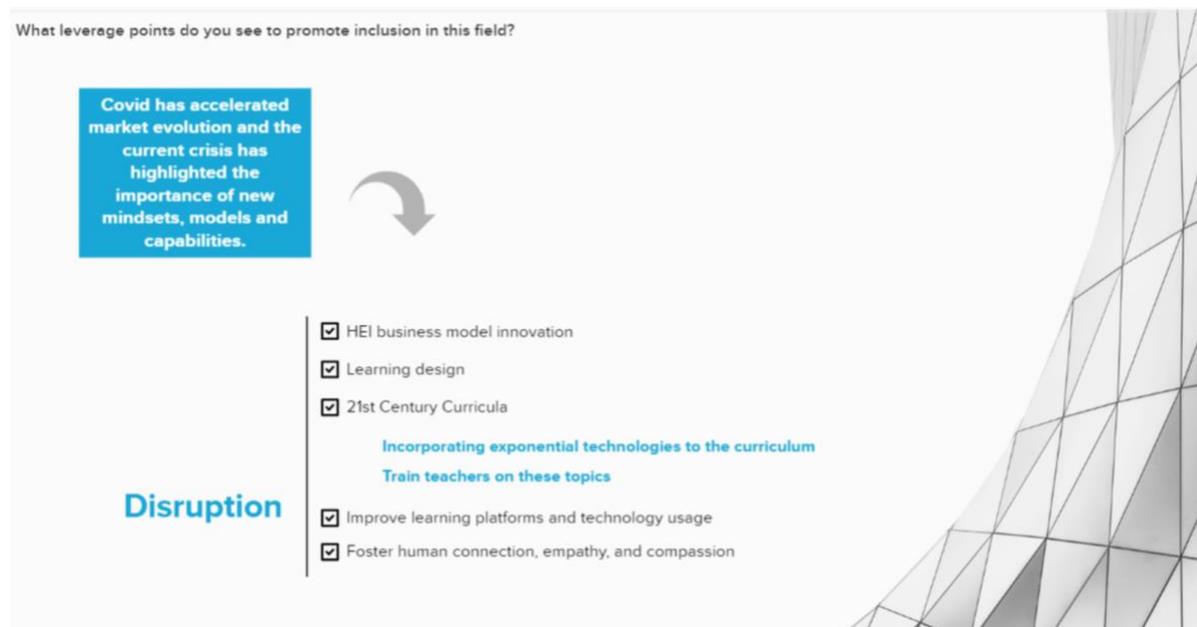
Click here to see Marcela's presentation and additional resources: Mural presentation.

After Marcela's presentation, members of the expert group shared to the following inputs, reflections related to the status quo, risks and opportunities presented.

Comments on Status Quo:

- The 21st century skills listed by WEF are being already taught in some parts of Europe financed by EU Commission to develop content on data science and AI in different disciplines e.g. medicine, tourism, law. Algebra College is involved in a project like this.

- A new buzzword getting much attention in Japan nowadays: Society 5.0. This term describes the society that comes after the digital transformation, and the skills and competencies that people need to have essentially in order to be employable in Society 5.0. 21st century skills used to be in the focus of attention, but now we have to go beyond, and we need a paradigm shift in the curriculum. At policy level a new ministry, the Ministry of Digitalisation of Japan will be responsible for putting this phase forward.

- In Japan, programming an AI are already part of the elementary level education. The power of AI has been rapidly penetrating to the world and changing the demand for future human skillsets. For example, speaking foreign languages will not be a high demand skill any more, with the wide-spread availability of automated translation. However, humans will need to get training on how to speak in a way that machines can understand, recognise and process. We will see many more unexpected skills rising in the future.

- Quality assurance of online opportunities needs to be addressed in the status quo. Learners have a lot of opportunities to do online classes, but they have difficulty in choosing the best one that fits them or the one that provides the quality standard that will enable them to improve uh themselves as professionals.

Comments on Risks:

- The main risk lies in policies. Political aspects of new technologies need to be analysed and ethical guidelines need to be associated with their use. Students must be a part of this policy making process.

- Futurists are saying that they only can predict the next three or four months at maximum, because the world is changing so fast. They do not recommend companies to make more than five years plans. So, the only thing that we can recommend from a policy perspective is having flexibility, because we know that stakeholders will need the capacity to change and adapt quickly over time.

- The real risk is in the way we are handling this paradigm of change. Do we want to change cultures in higher education, educate future ready graduates? Do we know how to educate future ready graduates? We did plenty of research on future readiness of universities and higher education systems, and the general perception of stakeholders was that they are not ready for a paradigm change. So, the question is how can we leverage now this emerging digital higher education power to focus more on future skills?

- There is a risk that we become content centric again, that we think higher education is about content. The "renaissance of content" is dangerous, we already know that education is not about sending around books or learning materials, that it is really more, it is weaving a network of experiences through digital technology, connecting humans and resources, critical reflection of their actions and so on. We should not go back to the renaissance of content and that is the risk I would like to highlight here.

- The community stakeholder approach is an opportunity for digital learning. It means that different actors of society need to get involved into the design and delivery of higher education. We need to move away from the professor to student relation and invite actors like parents, private sector, NGOs, etc.

- The co-creation process of digital formats enables relevant stakeholders to become part of the process and define the future of education. We need legal frameworks in which this co-creation process can happen.

Comments on Leverage Points:

- There is an opportunity to utilise the significant number of hours people spend on the internet for more learning. Peoples' habits could change in order to spend their time at least partially for learning while they are online. Universities need to rethink their position and think about abundance of cheap content online, they could come up with something innovative in their strategy.

- All of us should be aware that the speed of change in which we live right now is the slowest speed of change we are going to experience in the rest of our lives. I am not sure how long can we call it a disruption and just accept that changes are fast and going to get even faster.

- A thought on false opportunities and real opportunities. The false opportunities are concepts that we hear a lot e.g. personalization of learning. Personalization of learning in practice typically means making learning efficient and saving money and all other measures rather than actually empowering individuals to develop and become and full persons.

- There is a tension between universities as seats of excellence and expertise and learning and research on the one hand, and on the other hand, students being reconceptualized as consumers of learning, who can buy and grab what they want. This tension is significant

and not really being explored. Traditionally universities have been in a delivery mode, they deliver it to the students who choose to turn up and pay the resources. Clearly, with the "Netflix model" this is changing to an "access mode" where students are accessing the learning and sharing the learning. I see this as an opportunity but there is a huge tension.

- There are fantastic opportunities but at the same time we have some fantastic traditions that cannot be thrown away just to grab hold of the new opportunities. I think we need more groups like this to have these discussions from different perspectives.

- I am particularly interested as university administrator myself how to balance between using digital technology in teaching and learning and people-to-people connections. In our case we have replaced traditional teaching with 100% online teaching during the pandemic, but in the future, we will pursue a hybrid model.

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