

Redefining the Roles of Teachers in Post-Covid Education

by Le Dinh Bao Quoc

The ongoing worldwide pandemic has spread for over 3 years and changed our lives in all aspects. In education, the sudden change in teaching and learning has put teachers in difficult situations. According to the report *Language teaching experiences during Covid-19* published by British Council (Mavridi, 2022), an overwhelming majority of teachers struggled in their professional life and with their well-being.

On the brighter side, though the pandemic is still there, “the end is in sight”, said Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at a virtual press conference on September 14, 2022. Things now seem to have returned to normal in most parts of the world. However, the current normal is not exactly the normal we used to enjoy. It is the new one with many *challenges*, which force teachers to adjust their *roles* and equip themselves with essential *skills* to ensure the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

The Post-Covid Education challenges

The first obvious challenge is that the pandemic has innovated our teaching philosophy, practices, and routines. Whether we want it or not, we must adapt to these new changes. An example of this is that teaching now is not seen as teachers standing in front of the class, but teaching now can be virtual with the students interacting with the teachers via tech tools.

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Second, we need to learn new technologies to cope with the situation. It is true that before the pandemic we did use technologies, but during the COVID, everyone has witnessed the boom of tech tools, which will definitely continue after the pandemic.

The third challenge – emotion – has a huge impact on all education stakeholders. Due to the mandatory and unprepared shift to online classes, everyone suffered traumas or negative feelings of isolation, stress, and uncertainty. Therefore, teachers must be well aware of their own and others' emotions and how to deal with these feelings effectively and cleverly.

Fourth, despite the physical and emotional distance during the pandemic, it is critical for teachers to maintain and strengthen the relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. It is said that strong relationships in-and-outside school can significantly improve students' motivation and learning outcome. (EdTrust, 2021)

As hard as it may sound, with all these formidable challenges, teachers must continue to ensure and enhance students' learning outcome in this Post-Covid Education. What roles should we play as teachers in this challenging time?

Teachers' new roles

Role 1: Autonomous lifelong learners

A joint statement from UNESCO, ILO, UNICEF and Education International issued in 2020 emphasizes the significance of learning: “To build a more resilient teacher workforce in times of crisis, all teachers should be equipped with digital and pedagogical skills to teach remotely, online, and through blended or hybrid learning, whether in high-, low- or no-tech environments.” (UNESCO, 2020).

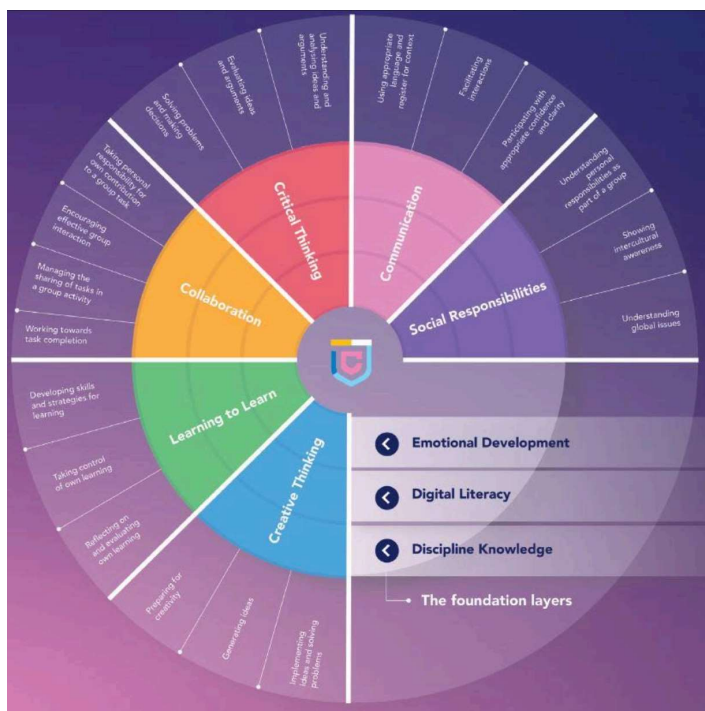
Learning helps us to adapt to the sudden changes in education. New research findings and advancements in methodologies and Edtech are reported every day. Only with learning can we utilize new technologies, improve our teaching practices, and enhance students' learning. Learning also helps us to improve our life skills, such as communication, building relationships, or controlling our emotions. All these enable us to overcome the challenges mentioned above.

Role 2: Life-skill educators

“Our world is changing fast and we need to prepare our students with the skills and experiences that go beyond simply learning an additional language.” This quote is from Cambridge in reference to the *Life Competencies Framework* for the students.

Despite the tradition, a teacher's job now is also to empower students to become independent citizens, who can live and work in the uncertain time. Students in the New Normal need not only scientific knowledge but also need teachers to teach them the life skills, which according to the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework, are as follows:

• Lifelong learning	• Digital Literacy
• Collaboration	• Critical thinking
• Problem-solving	• Creative thinking
• Communication	• Social responsibility



Cambridge Life Competencies Framework

Source: Cambridge.org

Role 3: Innovators of change

With what the pandemic has brought to us, innovation has become more critical in education. As for teachers, they are no longer the “content dispensers”, but they must always try to be the “creators of engagement.”

To do this, teachers should not only focus on how to link innovations to teaching or learning, but also bring innovations to change education systems. This addresses the diversity of the new teaching and learning context, offers more supports for teachers and learners, and provides all teachers and learners with the necessary skills to create a better future for themselves and their communities.

Role 4: Motivators

In this era of uncertainties, being an effective motivator is one of the keys to success. For ourselves as teachers, that is how we motivate ourselves to learn, to stay up-to-date with technologies, and to fulfill our teaching job the best we can.

For our students, one of the essentials is that we must motivate them both inside and outside the classrooms.

While doing this in face-to-face classroom sounds more familiar, motivating them in virtual classes can be challenging. How can we motivate them when they are not within our sight physically or when they leave Zoom and turn off their computers? An effective tip for this is to create projects or problems for the students to work on. As the final purpose of learning is solving problems, teachers can create personalized, hands-on, real-world problems for students to solve. Working on these projects, they will connect their lives and their world with the content and the tasks, which let them in turn see the purpose of learning and increase their motivation.

Role 5: Bond builders

As relationships play a very important role in our society and education, building the bonds between teachers and other stakeholders is essential if we still desire to ensure and enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

To become effective bond builders, teachers need to build relationships with students, parents, and colleagues both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers can utilize technology like emails, video calls, or social networking sites to build and maintain these relationships with their “clients”. Good relationships will allow us to motivate students, understand their problems, and stay connected with our colleagues emotionally and professionally.

Teachers’ skill box

Acknowledging our new roles is only the prerequisite in becoming effective teachers in the Post-Covid Education. The sufficiency is how to train ourselves to fulfill these roles successfully. Which skills should be in the teachers’ skill box?

Skill 1: Lifelong learning

Generally, lifelong learning is a form of self-initiated education, which allows us to improve personally or professionally. We can train and keep upskilling ourselves to become efficient lifelong learners by

- *Developing our growth mindset.* With a growth mindset, we strongly believe that we can improve ourselves by learning.
- *Taking control of our own learning.* That means becoming autonomous, maintaining motivation, and staying focused to achieve the best results.
- *Improving our learning-to-learn skill.* The American futurist Alvin Toffler, in his book Future Shock, said: “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” In this rapid-growing society, anything we learn yesterday can become outdated today. We need to learn how to unlearn old ideas to learn something better and more efficient in our current situation.
- *Reflecting on and evaluating our own learning.* This helps us to learn from our mistakes and experiences.

Skill 2: Digital literacy

The second skill we need in this technological era is certainly digital literacy. How can we imagine living in this current world without digital literacy right? What do we need to do to get this skill?

- *Understand the digital trends* like AI, IoT (Internet of Things), Edtech, AR, VR, etc. It is not necessary to understand what they are and how they work technically, but it is beneficial to know what they can do for us.
- *Learn how to search for reliable information.* Searching for information is considered the most widely used function of the Internet, but we cannot trust all the information we found on the web. Thus, it is vital to evaluate the information sources carefully.
- *Master the tech tools for teaching and learning.* How can we and our students survive in this online education world without tech tools?
- *Being safe in the virtual world.* They say the virtual world is dangerous with numerous scams or traps. We must think carefully before posting something on Facebook or Twitter, clicking on a link, or downloading a picture.

Skill 3: Creativity and Innovation

Creativity and innovation empower teachers to enhance their teaching practices, motivate their students, and establish the social relationships more effectively.

Below is an example of creativity and innovation by a teacher from Wisconsin.

During digital learning, I've heard students say that they miss collaboration and working with partners to construct learning, so I've developed activities to meet those needs. I offered students the opportunity to collaborate in groups as they developed proposals for a business idea. I've also offered simulation games via Zoom conferencing so students can spend time with their friends despite social distancing.

(A Social Studies teacher from Greendale, Wisconsin, Edweek, 2020)

To train ourselves to be creative and innovative, we must

- *Face and accept changes.* Hiding from them or staying in our comfort zone only brings us nothing for our personal and professional development.
- *Think outside the box.* Look at things from different perspectives and change our ways of thinking.
- *Try new solutions to old problems.* Doing this creates more innovative ideas and alternatives.
- *Get the following phrases out of our mind: I'm afraid... I'm scared... I don't think it'll work...* They will lock us in our personal shells and prevent us from innovative ideas and solutions.

Skill 4: Emotional intelligence

This skill is the ability to identify and deal with the emotions of ourselves and others. As the pandemic is proven to negatively affect people's emotion, this skill becomes one of the must-haves for teachers in the Post-Covid Education. As teachers, it is critical to understand the emotions of all stakeholders so that we can address them effectively, ensuring the teaching and learning outcome.

For example, if we feel we are getting angry, we should pause our speech, calm down, breathe and concentrate on our breath to switch our focus away from the source of the anger. Or if we notice a student of ours is unmotivated, we can assign a more challenging problem for him to solve.

Skill 5: Connection with people

Research shows that "strong relationships provide a foundation for student engagement, belonging, and, ultimately, learning. The more high-quality relationships students have with their teachers, the better their engagement in school." (EdTrust, 2021). Connecting with people, therefore, becomes a must-have in a teacher's skill box, especially after the pandemic. The following tips can help us develop this important skill.

- *Understand people's needs for connection.* Everyone has different needs for connection, which we need to understand and adjust our connection with them accordingly.
- *Be truly present in conversations.* When talking with people, show that we are engaged and interested by listening actively and asking questions. Do not break the connection by checking phones or looking around.

- *Have empathy.* Feeling the emotions of others and with others allows them to connect with us.
- *Emphasize the positives.* Our students always need recognition. Praising makes them feel happy, excited, and motivated to learn.

Conclusion

There is no training program that could have prepared us to teach during or after the pandemic. The onus is on us to prepare ourselves and our beloved students for this difficult time. Acknowledging our five new roles and preparing ourselves for them will contribute to our professional development and students' learning outcome, making learners not only better prepared and skilled at their academic work but also more adaptable to the uncertainty.

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