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Changing the way teachers teach. Is technology the elephant in the classroom?

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In March, SCLThailand published an article by Dr Nancy Sulla, on *Learner Active, Technology Infused Classrooms*, in the paper, Dr Nancy argued for the role of the teacher to swing from “teacher as ferry” to “teacher as bridge” a strong metaphor for changing the pedagogy of the teacher from “controller of learning” to “facilitator of learning”



This is a metaphor for 21st Century pedagogy that Student Centred Learning Thailand [SCLT] strongly supports.

In many parts of the world, discourse in education emphasises the need for pedagogy in this century to be different from what has existed in the past.

That is not to say that all previous teaching methods should be abandoned, for example, the principles of Socratic dialogue which are taught in many schools, goes back to the days of Socrates. Many schools teach these principles to their students. This is one example among many examples which could be quoted about pedagogies of the past which still have value to today and it is not intended

as a criticism of Dr Sulla’s metaphor of “teacher as bridge”.

Reading the article, I found it stimulating and helpful, as our school, a relatively young and growing school, is looking at increasing our provision of instructional technology. As we prepare an instructional technology plan for the future, we are determined to look carefully into how we go about implementing wider use of such technology in our school.

In our relatively low tech school, I am pleased to say that even without pervasive instructional technology, our teachers are already well removed from the mode of teacher as “controller of learning” and are well immersed in the of the “teacher as facilitator of learning” practice.

Evidence of this can be seen in the some of the through lines of pedagogical practice in use in the school in teaching techniques such as “making thinking visible and developing self -awareness in our students through “mindfulness” practices which are supported by building the students’ emotional intelligence through a strong school wide socio-emotional program.

I agree that it is imperative to change teaching methodology to suit the socio-economic demands of the 21st Century and I acknowledge the obvious contribution instructional technology can make to the learning of students and teachers’ teaching.

But I see many *aporiae* [puzzlements, doubts] about how instructional technology should be handled in schools and these *aporiae* come from the plethora of debates about the impact of ICTS on teaching and learning.

Recently, John Vallance, the principal of one of Sydney's most elite private schools, Sydney Grammar, said that laptops were not necessary in class and that more traditional teaching methods were more effective.

[Sydney Morning Herald, April 1st 2016]ⁱ

In the same article, Andreas Schleicher, leader of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's education division and chief organiser of the PISA international measures of student performance, had this to say to world leaders at a global education forum in March this year:

"The reality is that technology is doing more harm than good in our schools today"

He also went on to say *"If we want our children to be smarter than a smartphone then we have to think harder,"*

These and many other writers' articles and research are the cause of my aporiae about instructional technology in education.

The award-winning New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman has written extensively about issues relating to the great changes being wrought on nations throughout the world in the 21st Century.

Ask anyone what these major issues might be and they will soon come up with answers such as "impact of technology on our society"; "climate change"; "educational inequality"; "the threat of terrorism"; "damage to the natural environment" and so the list of issues and concerns expands rapidly.

Friedman's writing on these issues has a common thread.... just consider the titles of some of his books "Hot, Flat, and Crowded"ii; [about the impact of environmental change and its impact on life in USA, published in 2008] and "The World Is Flat,iii 3.0" [an update on globalization, its opportunities for individual empowerment, its achievements at lifting millions out of poverty, and its drawbacks—environmental, social, and political] and so we can go on interpreting what we read from such respected writers and what we know about the state of our world.

When I say "we", I refer to those who follow SCLThailand.com and this can be taken as we – educators and all involved in education in Thailand, in the context of this web site, we are searching for ways to help Thai provide education at all levels which will help the nation cope with the demands that Friedman's books talk about - social, economic and geo – political change in the 21st Century.

What Nancy Sulla writes about, relates directly to what Thomas Friedman says in his books.

I worry about a particular scene I see regularly. I will share that scene with you.

It's 08.15, school classes for young children in Nursery and Kindergarten begin soon and the parent and nannies are flooding in to the school from the surrounding high rise apartment blocks. Parents often push their 2 and 3 year olds to school in strollers, the children are mostly happy, smiling and saying hello. They look forward to their day in our pre -school classes, their day will be fun and based mostly on play.

But one little boy, 2- 3 years of age, arrives every day in his stroller push by his smiling mother who greets me and I greet both her and the child, mother smiles back, the little one ignores me. Every day. Why?

He is glued to the screen of his mother's smart phone no conversation, just serious concentration on what he is watching.

Contrast this with a conversation I had with the mother of a boy in Year 10, a 15-year-old.

She told me that when home, her teenage son would never use the tablet or computer without asking her for permission to use either of these devices, she also said that if she is not at home he will call her and ask permission.

Why such a contrast?

What parent is helping her child the most?

Easy answer, but then, parenting has never been easy and digital technology probably makes it even harder!!

ⁱ Full article: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/the-reality-is-that-technology-is-doing-more-harm-than-good-in-our-schools-says-education-chief-20160330-gnu370.html#ixzz48h7EKdCS>

ⁱⁱ *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution--and How It Can Renew America*, Friedman T, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, New York

ⁱⁱⁱ *The World is Flat* [3rd release], Friedman T, Picador, 2007