

India Today School Summit 2017: Accelerating innovation, technology and education

How the digital age has empowered children as agents of change.

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The second debate of the India Today School Summit was on accelerating innovation, technology and education. The speakers, Gavin Dabreo, CEO, Mind Champion Learning Systems, NIIT's subsidiary, Lisa Heydlauff, Founder, Going to School and Sashwati Banerjee, MD, Sesame Workshop India talked about how the digital age has empowered children as agents of change.

The panel discussion was preceded by a presentation on the work and achievements of Sesame Workshop India, a not-for-profit organization leading the movement to change the educational paradigm through its innovative projects that puts children at the center of

development. Banerjee said that the biggest challenge for all educationists is affordability and access to devices and data.

"Most educators these days are not equipped to address this change. We need solid policy adequacy for proper infrastructure and need to understand how digital education can be a supplement and enabler," explained Banerjee.

Taking the discussion forward Gavin Dabreo discussed how teachers and most adults today are a little awkward with technology. "We need to conduct experiments and accept that technological advancement has the capacity to deliver new academic outcomes. This needs to start with small schools because millions of children at the base of the pyramid are still struggling with virtual reality," said Dabreo.

In this highly polarized inter connected world, knowledge is more about application than access. Artificial intelligence is taking over the untapped aspects of the education industry. A child born in 2017 will be in a different environment than the children of the 80s or 90s.

Talking about the technology-heavy future, Heydlauff said the Indian hardware is not up to the mark. "It's all moving so fast that there really is a hardware gap. We need to ask what we want and what we are looking at. With massive potential in the digital age, we can't and don't want to replace local role models; it must revolve around developing open systems and apt mediums," explained Heydlauff. Banerjee added that content plays a major role because in the end technology is just a mere platform.

On being asked about the innovative ways a teacher can adopt in classrooms, Heydlauff said feedbacks by young people are the most important part. "By listening what a student wishes to learn helps an educator design the curriculum; children can often create their own content and design stories. We must let them lead from the very beginning," added Heydlauff.

Students will only gradually learn and unlearn everything that the internet throws at them. "We must collectively make sure that the content has feel and there is no negative role-modeling. While teaching children to be stronger, we need to make sure that they are kinder," explained Banerjee.

Dabreo emphasised on how children must be allowed to blossom by being engaged in a dialogue; the right to disrupt and question should not be taken away from them. According to Heydlauff, "teachers are adults and often parents. The process of shifting to virtual reality should be started with them. Parents and teachers need to learn how to work as a community."

Discussing the dilemma of a teacher, Banerjee said that we must accept the fact that teachers and educators are under a lot of pressure. Often overburdened and stressed, teachers do not receive any rewards or recognition; there is nothing to incentivise them. "The only relief is that even though aspirations still exist, they are today meshed with a high realization," said Banerjee.