

Using "Paradigm Shift" to qualify education disruption

Could we use the term "Paradigm Shift" to describe the deep transformation in learning models around the world?!

Leaving lifelong learning process aside, just for a while, I would like to introduce you to one of the most influential works of the nineteenth century. It is entitled: "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions", a book by Thomas Kuhn published in 1962. It is still considered as a landmark event in epistemology! Kuhn's work had been influential with enormous impact, which can be measured by the changes it brought about in the vocabulary of the philosophy of science. We owe to Kuhn many new terms e.g. paradigms shift, incommensurability, scientific revolutions, etc.

For Kuhn science has undergone periodic revolutions or "Paradigm shifts" rather than a linear accumulation of new knowledge! A scientific revolution is better defined by an unexpected and huge transformation in the nature of scientific inquiry within a particular field. It refers to new approaches to understanding that scientists would never have considered valid before! Instead of the so-called "normal science" whose progress is seen as "development-by-accumulation", Kuhn proposed revolutions! In fact Kuhn coined the term "normal science" to refer to the relatively routine, day-to-day work of scientists working within a paradigm. For Kuhn, periods of such conceptual continuity in normal science were interrupted by periods of revolutionary science!

As a momentous event, Kuhn's book triggered a worldwide reaction in scientific communities. Kuhn went beyond this proposal to insist that a paradigm shift combined sociology, enthusiasm and scientific promise, but not a logically determinate procedure. Scientists developed different opinions vis-à-vis Kuhn's work ranging from realistic humanism to tarnishing the nobility of science!

To make it short, the discovery of anomalies results, usually, in a new thought pattern that changes the research directions to ask new questions and build new models. For Kuhn science can be divided into three distinct stages: prescience, paradigm conception, followed a long period of normal science. He argues that commitment to the new paradigm prompts the normal science to be extremely productive. Any failure of a result to fit with the established paradigm is considered, paradoxically, as a mistake of researcher and not as a whack to the paradigm!!! A revolution in science originates when anomalous results start to build up, then science reaches a crisis, at which point a new paradigm is accepted.

Are we witnessing a revolution in education right now?! Obviously the answer is yes! Are we equipped to help our students to take advantage so that they become active learners? Are we prepared to take the journey with passion and commitment to achieve most out of the so-called learning revolution?! Decision makers need a vision! And this is not an understatement!