



PRACTITIONER'S REPORT

Students as Agents of Change in Career Education

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Facework India

Abstract

In this paper I present findings from a four-week qualitative research project which engaged over two hundred Indian young people from different states across North India. Through participatory learner-centred activities and an engaging iterative design methodology, (based on a cyclic process of prototyping, testing, analysing and refining), my team and I were able to engage young learners, seek their views and co-create a more holistic employability curriculum.

Working intensely with these young people gave us the opportunity to pilot and test the relevance of the Facework employability training programme which was originally developed in the UK. The programme focuses on helping young people to work together to identify the relevant soft-skills needed for the changing world of work and find creative ways to develop awareness messages, training resources and activities so other students can master these skills. This is done through helping students understand the importance of embracing a Growth Mindset and helping students to identify and grow personal Character Strengths.

The Facework India pilot has shown that Indian students are aware of the need to develop their soft-skills, but lack the opportunities to learn and practice these within the current education system.

In his book *Future Shock* Alvin Toffler highlights the importance of youth involvement in all forms of social development (Toffler 1970). Nearly 50 years on from Toffler's writing, there have been massive societal changes which in turn have elevated the rights and participation of young people as agents of change. These include the following:

Changes in Technology

Improved connectivity means youth voice is increasingly loud and clear, including their resistance. India currently has one of the highest smart phone growth rates of any country in the world (E-Marketer, 2018) and is one of the most important markets for services such as YouTube and

Facebook. Our discussions with students showed that many of them were already learning from online resources outside of the conventional classroom.

Self-Actualisation

Today many young people have different attitudes to mobility work/life balance and what constitutes a good stable career. Many students are embracing a more contemporary concept of choosing a path which is right for them; one which brings about personal fulfilment and meaning not just economic stability. The old, fixed mindset and concepts of what makes a "good" job, handed down by parents and teachers, were out of date, amongst the students we interviewed.

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Youth Empowerment

Young people are now responding to global issues such as climate change (e.g., Greta Thunberg), gender equality (e.g., Malala Yousafzai), and gun control (e.g., the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida). Our discussions with students highlighted that these role-models were becoming an inspiration for many young people who now have examples where young people have worked to bring about change.

These three developments are shaping youth. Many young people are rejecting things being done 'to' them and the rallying cry of "Nothing about Us without Us" is gathering momentum. The British Council report on youth leadership indicates that Indian students want the freedom and opportunity to make educational decisions (British Council, 2013).

It is therefore disappointing to see that within the Education system across India and around the world, the opportunity to harness young people's ideas, passions, and networks are not being given adequate prominence. Even within the current best practice guidance for careers educators, such as the Gatsby Foundation Benchmarks promoted in the UK there is no explicit recognition to support students to become enablers, peer mentors, and active designers in career education and training. (Gatsby Foundation Benchmarks, n.d.)

The opportunity to develop students as agents for change is enormous in India, but so too is the challenge as illustrated by the following statistics extracted from newspaper reports.

- Just 14% of graduates leaving Indian Universities are job-ready. (Indian Employability Survey 2014)
- India Today (2019) highlights from a report on career development that 93% of students aged 14 to 21 were aware of just seven career options, though there are more than 250 different types of job options available in India.
- The Economic Times (2014), reports that nearly 85% of Higher Education candidates are not equipped to take career education decisions.

The paucity of qualified career guidance personnel in Indian schools illustrates the reality that there is simply no alternative to responding to the challenges of a growing population and the change in work brought about by the emergence of the 4th industrial revolution, without fundamentally re-framing the way we engage students not just as learners but enablers with peer influence, agency and choice. This is the underlying rationale for developing the Facework programme which aimed to address three important questions:

1. What is the youth's understanding of "soft-skills" for employment, and where do they currently learn these skills?
2. What activities, interventions, and resources could be co-designed with the students which would be more effective in introducing these skills to a digitally connected generation?
3. What can we learn from modelling a learner-centred pedagogy in teaching employability and careers education? How can this be shared and scaled so that schools, universities and indeed employers have a radical new youth-created employability curriculum?

Background to Facework

In the UK alternative schools cater to students with behavioural difficulties and there is concern about the numbers of students excluded from mainstream schools (House of Commons Education Committee, 2018). In 2014 I had the privilege of working with young people in the UK, who for different reasons were excluded from mainstream schooling and taught in such an alternative school. Many of these students were disruptive, angry and felt "pushed-out" of society. They already believed they were a failure and the challenge was to ensure that as they left schooling, they became successful in work. Over a 2-year period I committed myself to learn from these students by getting them to help me really understand the challenges and barriers they faced when it came to leaving school and facing work. This deep learning was essential to unlock and explore vital issues with this student group, including the importance of well-being in transition, how to maintain motivation and overcome failure, how to understand the students' sense of isolation.

Taking an empathetic student-led approach was crucial, not just in running the sessions but in getting the students to design their own activities and learning resources. Over a two-year period, I engaged different groups of excluded learners in employability training using the following interventions:

- Taking students out of their school to visit places of work.
- Demonstrating how presentation skills can build self-confidence. This included filming the young people to share what they had learnt.
- Facilitating one set of students from a school, to travel to another part of the country to share what they had learnt to other students.
- Encouraging better interaction with employers including using role-play and mock interviews and getting students to undertake research about the local employment market.
- Validating the student's use of social media within the classroom so we could show how online resources could stimulate learning.
- Designing innovative resources (online and offline) which helped extend the learning outside of the classroom.
- Piloting how an alternative accreditation and reward system could be developed. This included working with the leading UK awarding body the OCR (Oxford, Cambridge RSA) to map the skills we covered to their existing qualifications programmes.
- Co-designing a unique Scratch Card to enable students to rate their mates. (See figure 1).

We summarised the 5 core Soft-Skills needed for work as STEPS; Self-Management, Teamwork, Enterprise, Problem-Solving, and Speaking and Listening (see Figure 1).

The initial learnings from this intervention were published in a series of articles in the popular media (I described the learning gained from this work in a series of articles for the Huffington Post newspaper (Carrick-Davies, 2014; Carrick-Davies, 2017) and all the resources were made available on a Facework website. www.facework.today.

Figure 1: Scratch Card

WHAT ARE THE SKILLS YOU NEED TO FACE WORK?

Employers are looking for staff who can prove they have these 5 CORE SKILLS

S T E P S

There are many different attempts to list 5 core skills. Rate yourself on how good you are and ask your mate to rate you too.

S SELF-MANAGING
HOW DO YOU PROVE YOU CAN MANAGE YOURSELF?
YOUR RATES: 1 2 3 4
MATE'S RATES: 1 2 3 4
TOTAL SCORE: 1 2 3 4
LOW → HIGH

- MANAGING TIME
- APPEARING SMART
- MANAGING EMOTIONS
- BELIEVING IN YOURSELF
- GETTING BACK UP

T TEAM WORKING
WHAT MAKES YOU A GOOD TEAM PLAYER?
YOUR RATES: 1 2 3 4
MATE'S RATES: 1 2 3 4
TOTAL SCORE: 1 2 3 4
LOW → HIGH

- PLAYING TO THE RULES
- RESPECTING OTHERS
- BEING RELIABLE
- PROMOTING OTHERS
- LEARNING FROM OTHERS

E ENTERPRISING
DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT?
YOUR RATES: 1 2 3 4
MATE'S RATES: 1 2 3 4
TOTAL SCORE: 1 2 3 4
LOW → HIGH

- USING INITIATIVE
- HANDLING CHANGE
- USING FEEDBACK
- GIVING IDEAS
- TRYING NEW THINGS

P PROBLEM SOLVING
WHAT EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE AT SOLVING PROBLEMS?
YOUR RATES: 1 2 3 4
MATE'S RATES: 1 2 3 4
TOTAL SCORE: 1 2 3 4
LOW → HIGH

- SPOTTING PROBLEMS
- ADMITTING MISTAKES
- ASKING QUESTIONS
- FIXING PROBLEMS
- PERSEVERING WHATEVER

S SPEAKING + LISTENING
HOW DO YOU IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION?
YOUR RATES: 1 2 3 4
MATE'S RATES: 1 2 3 4
TOTAL SCORE: 1 2 3 4
LOW → HIGH

- SHARING SELF-INTERESTS
- LISTENING WELL
- USING BODY LANGUAGE
- COMMUNICATING WELL
- UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

WHAT'S YOUR COMBINED SCORE?
Add up the totals you gave yourself and then add up the scores your mate gave you. Are they similar? What did you score best in?

What's the secret of getting a job?
Scratch the panel to see!

MASTER THESE 5 CORE SKILLS AND YOUR CONFIDENCE WILL GROW

One of the young learners continued to work with me on the Facework project until he himself got a job. He is now a manager in a tools hire company and puts his success down to the experience he had in being trusted to help his peers do better work.

The Case for India

Following this experience in the UK, I had the opportunity in 2016 to work across India, Nepal and Bhutan on education initiatives (including teacher training, funding the building of schools and piloting ICT programmes). This led to an invitation to run intensive 2-day workshops in North India with students in university, college and schools, as well as with unemployed youth in the community to test the Facework methodology. India has one of the largest student population in the world and hence there is an urgent need to steer this massive cohort to ensure that the demographic dividend of the country is utilised. There are tremendous opportunities emerging for career guidance. Collating various reports Tandon (2019) writes for example that

the market size for career guidance is over INR 5,000 crore in India alone and is continuously growing.

Working with an Indian Social Entrepreneur and an experienced Indian trainer we ran workshops which promoted teamwork, critical-thinking and presentation skills. All of this was backed by reflection, and critical analysis. Through gauging their feedback, and ideas we believe we can help young people “face work,” and make a successful transition from College/University to employment and enterprise. In total the project identified 7 findings:

- Young people agreed that soft-skills training is currently given very low attention in schools and universities.
- The educators we interacted with recognised the need to better prepare students for the world of work.
- The methodology we used in developing Facework is as significant as the actual content produced.
- The Facework training not only prepared the youth for work, it is also key to their personal development and growth.
- Creating a distinct aspirational and ‘cool’ brand to inspire youth proved enormously powerful.
- The Facework ethos of valuing each young person was crucial to the success of the pilot especially in establishing trust which aided students to feel comfortable to share their experiences.
- When given the opportunity, students were forthcoming in sharing their learnings to their peers using social media and film making.

Combining the feedback received from the students with those from the key-informant interviews with teachers, policy makers and parents, we are now seeking to adapt the Facework content and suite of resources for use across India. The full report is available on the www.facework.in website. The rest of the paper focusses on three of the lessons learnt which I believe have most relevance for practitioners both in India and elsewhere.

Start with the Mindset

Mitchell and Krumboltz (1999), writing about planned happenstance argue that learners maintain career myths that hold them back. These thinking patterns need to

be reframed and counsellors need to teach students to engage in exploratory activities to increase the chances of discovering unexpected career opportunities. It is important however that idea that unplanned events can become opportunities for learning in country like India, fits into a cultural ethos that values conventional career paths. This fixed mindset was tackled in the Facework pilot.

In tackling the question about good jobs, and the forthcoming changes that the 4th Industrial Revolution will bring about, one of the students recounted her attempt over 3 years to get a job in the banking industry. At 22 she already felt unsuccessful and was anxious that she would bring real shame on her family. When she shared that she was currently working in a gym as a trainer and had a passion for photography we asked how could she approach a career in these industries with her parents? *“I could never bring this up with my parents, they would be very angry”* she stated.

The group came up with an idea of designing a survey which students could use to ask parents about their aspirations for the next generation’s career. The questions which the students came up with illustrated in the video <https://vimeo.com/379971077> designed by the students is an example of how students can find creative solutions to educating their parents about what constitutes a good job. The Facework pilot showed us that any good careers engagement in India must have an active strategy to help parents better understand the changing nature of work and how their fixed mindset which may have been appropriate for their career needs updating. Facework also adapted various techniques from cognitive behaviour therapy (e.g., Stuck Points) to help students learn to challenge prevailing mindsets and assumptions.

At the end of the pilot we made a film exploring how parents influence student’s career choices. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0eXqgY8K3Y>. We also made a film with one of the students who recorded a poem he wrote about his experience of talking to his parents and we filmed this. *“The world has changed, and so have I since our time way back then, I have my own dreams that I wish to gain, so please, a chance is all that I ask, a chance to take on my own risk, which with your blessing will be much less of a task”*

Introducing Character Strengths

We introduced students to the concept of character strengths which is increasingly being used in schools in other countries. This input helps students identify their qualities and inherent character strengths. Once these are identified a student can review the careers in which these strengths can be utilised. We ran a series of activities which helped students uncover their strengths, such as perseverance, self-regulation, prudence, love of learning, hope, gratitude, perspective, teamwork, and social intelligence. Students worked in groups to discuss their learnings and reflections on their own character strengths. This was followed by reviewing the link between their Character Strength and their career choices where they could utilise these strengths.

Giving Students Voice and Nurturing Leadership

The educational philosopher, **John Dewey** (1938–1998) believed that a school curriculum could only be justified if it related as fully as possible to the activities and responsibilities that students will encounter *after* leaving school. What was once certain for earlier generations, is now unpredictable, and teachers need to help students acquire soft skills not just to survive but to thrive. Hambly and Bomford (2019) provide the metaphor of a scaffolding which allows students to move sideways, take a rest, re-train or take on unpaid work or voluntary roles. This is a helpful metaphor for India as young people across the country can be encouraged to recognise the value of social entrepreneurship, volunteering, and mentoring their fellow students- something which the Facework programme is wanting

to promote. These are the learning environments where children can learn emotional intelligences, character strengths and soft skills, and gain confidence in practice and mastery of these subjects. Indeed, it is the soft-skills, growth mindset and character strengths which will make a difference in a young person's career in the long term.

Conclusions, Challenges and Caveats

In preparing this paper I am profoundly aware of the limitations of this intervention. Bringing an intervention, even though it was adapted for India, could have carried unconscious biases. The pilot suffered from a lack of pre-intervention and post intervention data comparisons. However full written evaluation forms were completed at the end of each workshop which provide post hoc indications of the value the students and teachers gave to the course.

It is vital that we continue to listen to and capture the views of young people and create systems and methods of student-led education. We need to encourage them to be peer-mentors, challenge fixed mindsets, show others how to discover their character strengths and make soft-skills relevant to the world of work. The ultimate challenge is as much about inspiring and equipping young learners to teach, as it is encouraging older teachers to unlearn and re-learn as they adopt and practice a new pedagogy which truly engages a different type of learner. As Toffler (1970) says, "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."

About the author

Stephen Carrick-Davies, is a consultant at Facework India. His specialities include, international development, social change, E-Learning and Digital Citizenship training, producing media resources including writing, overseeing production of websites, films, resources etc., and advising other charities in developing their work and growth.

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