

Interviews with **Badrul Khan**



Interview with Nobel Laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus

I was fortunate to be invited as an e-learning keynote speaker at the Digital World 2012 International Conference (<http://www.digitalworld.org.bd/speakers/>) held at Dhaka, Bangladesh in December, 2012. During my visit there, I had the opportunity to meet Dr. Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Laureate, at the Yunus Centre. My meeting with him was a most insightful experience. We discussed education in the digital world, and I was impressed and inspired to see his genuine interest in improving education and healthcare using low-cost learning technology. He shared how technology can improve the conditions of citizens in developing countries. I have interviewed many individuals in my life, but sitting down with Prof. Yunus and speaking with him in my own local dialect was especially memorable, as we are both from Chittagong, Bangladesh, and studied in the same educational institutions at different periods: Chittagong Collegiate School, Chittagong College, and the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh. Our discussion of how to improve the lifestyles of people in developing countries was so cordial and satisfying that I wanted to stay longer than my one-hour



Muhammad Yunus was born in Chittagong, Bangladesh, and educated at Dhaka University. He was awarded a Fulbright scholarship and received his Ph.D. in economics from Vanderbilt University in 1969. The following year he became an assistant professor of economics at Middle Tennessee State University. In 1972 he went to the economics department

at Chittagong University and became the founder and managing director of Grameen Bank. Yunus and Grameen Bank are winners of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize. He has received global recognition for his efforts to combat poverty and is nicknamed “Banker to the Poor” (http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2006/yunus-bio.html).

meeting time, but Prof. Yunus was scheduled to meet and discuss the social entrepreneurship model with students from St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, right after my meeting. I was excited when he asked me to attend the discussion. He eloquently answered students’ questions and concerns regarding sustainable entrepreneurship.

While discussing low-cost learning solutions in the digital world, I noticed something fascinating: Not only did Yunus show enthusiasm for this idea, but also he demonstrated his passion to make the world a better place. He appeared to me as an accomplished, compassionate individual who genuinely supports low-cost, open learning. He is a proponent of high-quality Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). I was amazed at his wide understanding of this interest, and I was also impressed to see the level of thought and awareness of implications of the concept of low-cost learning tools. It was refreshing to see someone whose area of expertise is micro-finance and social business show such an engaging interest in digital learning.

As an educator, I always wondered what it would take to help individuals become lifelong learners and how to make learning sustainable. I personally believe that the knowledge base from disciplines outside of education should be explored, and these may provide valuable insights into sustainable educational development. I have also wondered what makes “learning that will stick.” This type of learning is different in that the learning will provide benefits that last a lifetime—information that is not easily forgotten. My quest for sustainable learning development was answered when I heard Prof. Yunus speak about social business and its sustainability. He described social business as a mode of representation for people to express their individual spirit—it allows people to get involved and find their own way of making a positive difference. When I was listening to Dr. Yunus, I was constantly making connections between critical factors of meaningful digital learning and his sustainability principles in social business. After this discussion was over, I wanted to incorporate his ideas of social business sustainability into my e-learning framework (<http://BadrulKhan.com/framework>) to publish a book; he generously agreed to co-author a book with me. The proposed book will showcase and draw from work on Sustainable Social Business Entrepreneurship perspectives, applicable to my eight dimensions of the e-learning framework, and will be

Badrul H. Khan, a Contributing Editor, is an author, educator, and consultant in the field of e-learning. His 1997 best-selling book, **Web-Based Instruction**, was important in paving the way for the field of e-learning. In recognition for his work in this field, the Egyptian E-Learning University Council has appointed him an honorary distinguished professor of e-learning. He has held faculty positions at the University of Texas and the George Washington University (Website: www.BadrulKhan.com). He acknowledges the assistance of Anika Alam, a student of Policy Analysis and Management, Cornell University, for this interview, who collected and analyzed Dr. Yunus’s social entrepreneurship principles applicable to educational sustainability; for the purpose of this interview, various documents about the Yunus perspectives on digital technologies were reviewed.



Prof. Muhammad Yunus is presented with the Congressional Gold Medal for his efforts to combat global poverty. He is the seventh recipient of this prestigious award; other honorees of the award include Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela. Presenting the award are Rep. Nancy Pelosi, Rep. John Boehner, and Sen. Harry Reid at the U.S. Capitol.

titled “Sustainable Education Development in the Digital World” (<http://www.igi-gloal.com/newsroom/archive/igi-global-best-selling-author-badrul/1443/>). This book should contribute to a new vision of learning and development in the digital world.

In April 2013, I met Dr. Yunus again, in Washington DC, and discussed sustainable education development. Some of the highlights of our conversation are presented below.

Khan: Your social business framework has been used as a model by thousands of companies and organizations around the world. What are the attributes of this model that sets it apart from other business ideas?

Yunus: Grameen Bank has harbored social business as a conceptual framework dedicated to solving social, economic, and environmental problems that have long been troubling humans—hunger, homelessness, disease, and pollution. There is no formal set of requirements of a social business framework; there is a simple concept associated with this model, which is to bring a humanistic view to the business world. What makes this model so universal is that it allows flexibility, and it enables people to achieve profits while solving a social problem at the same time. Ultimately, social business widens the scope of free choice, rather than narrowing it. It offers hope to millions of entrepreneurs and customers who want to make a social change in the marketplace. Social business can also help governments be responsible for social change as a stakeholder in society, endorsing corporate social responsibility.

Khan: We understand that your social business model is sustainable in various public sectors, especially education. What are the basic, transferable criteria from social business which can be utilized in long-term education development?

Yunus: The first criteria of social business is to let people release their entrepreneurial spirit. Social business is a new and exciting form of expression—there is no right way to do it. It provides an outlet for the creativity that millions of people already carry the potential for. It is open to people who may not feel comfortable with the restricted, one-track road to profit, while still being open to traditional business makers. Nobody is excluded from starting a social business. Similarly, education development can easily be rooted in creative startups. Uploading videos and clips of lectures is one example of making learning a sustainable process. There are also many accessible and readily available resources which can accommodate you in reaching your goals. The more you do it, the more sustainable your knowledge. There are limitless ways to transfer information from producer to consumer, and people can achieve this via for-profit or non-profit purposes. In social business, everyone is welcome to find the roles that work for them. The most important thing is to get involved and to find your own way of making a positive difference in the world. Another criterion that is applicable to education development is that it offers an opportunity for individual renewal. It is a great learning process where humans can explore a new world that was totally unknown and help solve a social problem at the same time. Social business can help governments be responsible for social change as stakeholders in society, endorsing corporate social responsibility. This addition to education sustainability can be especially beneficial because there are millions of companies and organizations worldwide who want to promote education development.

Khan: Technology is playing an increasingly large role in daily communication for everyone around the world. How can this be of advantage to education development in the future?

Yunus: As I mentioned in an interview years ago with CNN (http://money.cnn.com/2008/04/01/technology/muhammed_yunas.fortune/), technology is making more changes in our way of life than ever in human history. Technology is an advantageous universal mechanism that eliminates physical barriers between two persons, allowing limitless information to be transmitted. Even as we are becoming increasingly reliant on technology to meet our daily needs, there are still many people around the world who are deprived of these benefits. These technological innovations are flawed in the sense that they do not reach out to the poor. In my book, “Creating a World Without Poverty,” I emphasize the need to create new tech tools which will directly benefit the poor. With this pressing need to reach out to the poor worldwide, it will also attack another social problem—education. If given the proper tools and resources to those who were not privileged with technology, not only will it improve their lifestyle but also it will be a teaching tool. Building teaching tools for the poor will benefit both parties—not only will they have readily available access to information and help tools, but we will also have the opportunity to learn from them and see what information they can provide us.

Khan: Where do you see education development in the next five years?

Yunus: I see education development strengthening enormously. With the Internet in the reach of one's hand, there can be a mutual relationship between producers and consumers based on the exchange of information. Through this form of communication, you become a contributor to the knowledge base. You're not a beggar if you give back; you are a recipient of knowledge, and you are giving back. Sustainable education is a form of expression, and one has to know how to use these resources continuously to sustain new knowledge. If you learn more and contribute more, you have been transformed from the recipient to the contributor. I hope to see the mutual exchange of information move to a high level, where learning information will benefit people for the rest of their lives. It will be something that will be readily available and transferable.

Khan: What is your view on the use of information and communications technology tools in rural areas?

Yunus: I believe that information and communications technology (ICT) tools are the basic infrastructure for development and sustainability. Access to ICT tools can dramatically change the fate of the poor. Mobile devices with Internet connectivity are especially promising in the sense that they can help integrate the poor into the mainstream economy by extending their market. It can empower the poor by giving them access to information, programs, goods, and services which will improve their lifestyle. Knowledge is a powerful weapon—it helps them deal with their life struggles and helps reduce poverty immensely. In the past, Grameen Bank has provided ICT in rural parts of Africa and other regions.

Khan: What do you think about the development of low-cost mobile technology tools, such as mobile phones for education and other aspects, for the citizens of developing countries?

Yunus: I 100% agree that low-cost tools would be very beneficial for developing nations. If these tools are utilized appropriately, they can help create effective learning solutions and can revolutionize the educational system in developing countries and beyond. It is revolutionary in the sense that it could be shared not only among the mass population but also with older generations who were typically lagging behind in using such tools. Once they see the various functions and utilities of these technological tools, it will create interest and excitement among the older generations as well—to the extent that they might even compete with the younger generations in usage. However, it is important to keep in mind that the delivered content from these low-cost tools must be well-designed and meaningful. Low-cost learning solutions are therefore not only useful in education, but also in training. Mobile tools such as cell phones can provide greater opportunities. I am interested in the idea of rural populations using mobile devices to receive information and become knowledgeable so that they can improve their health conditions. They would also be able to transfer their knowledge and share it with others, improving their careers, health, business, financial decisions, and more. A great way to support human resources development globally! □



Looking Ahead Looking Back

Denis Hlynka

What's the 'Big Idea'? A View of Technology

One of the recent contemporary concepts in teaching and curriculum is that of the "big idea." A "big idea" is clearly defined by Wiggins and McTighe¹ as not a concept, not a question, not an objective, but rather a kind of culminating sentence of what one is trying to express. These ideas seem to be tied to essential questions and learnings.

Educators are always looking for ways to be precise and accurate about what we expect from students. In recent memory, the classic small programmed text from 1962 by Robert Mager called *Preparing Instructional Objectives*² was one of the first guides to such precision. Today, some argue that this approach is as good a starting point as any other, while others feel that Mager has had his day, and we need to move onward, upward, and towards something bigger and better.

I like the idea of "big ideas," though I do not care for the accompanying jargon. I also feel that the phrase is just a little condescending. To me it sounds like the way you might talk to an eight-year-old. I also balk at the suggestion that a "big idea" in the minds of Wiggins and McTighe cannot be written as a question, an objective, or a concept. Actually, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, an "idea" has several definitions, including a concept, a thought, or a construct.

Nevertheless, let me wipe away all of my objections for the moment, and turn what every faculty, school, or college of education offers, namely a course that is optional in some universities, required in many more, but always on the front burner of any faculty, school, or college of education.

In the basic *Teacher and Technology* course offered at my university, I attempt to break down myths and misconceptions about educational technology. I am told that my approach is apparently different from most similar courses, which tend to be heavier on "new technologies," "social technologies," and the

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¹Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

²Mager, R. (1962). *Preparing instructional objectives*. Belmont, CA: Fearon-Pittman.