

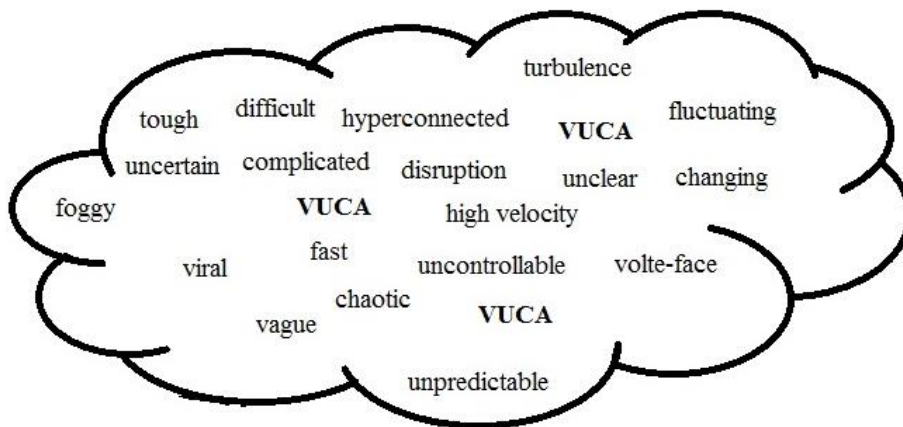
Growing up in a VUCA world

~ Sujata C



A new term is gaining currency in academic and business circles – VUCA.

VUCA is the acronym of *Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity* and *Ambiguity*. The concept of VUCA can be traced back to 1987 in the US Army War College. Then the Cold War between Soviet bloc countries and the Western powers was about to end, and the researchers at the college were exploring various strategies of leadership in the post-war environment that was going to become fluid and changeable. Under such circumstances, the concept of VUCA was formed by Warren Bennis and Burton Nanus to explain the different aspects of the situation. In the 21st century, the world has grown more chaotic and complex than ever making us recollect this thirty-year-old phenomenon.



For nearly two decades now, on almost every front, we have seen the old making way for the new. Almost all the established patterns and orders have been disrupted creating a nebulous political, economic and social climate in the world. Two factors are majorly responsible for this – the evolution of technology and armed conflicts. Digital revolution, which is also dubbed as *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*,¹ has put the world into a churn with all the technology induced changes that have come about. Like all revolutions, it has put society in a limbo, and that has taken a toll on normalcy and predictability.



¹ In his book, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Professor Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, has explored the changes made by digital convergence in the way we live, work and relate to one another.

Armed conflicts have become a near normal condition in the last two decades. Of the total 195 countries in the world, according to a report published in 2016, only 10 countries were not involved in any sort of armed conflict at that time². Three years later, the situation is no better. Wars or war-like situations continue to claim lives of civilians, and throw life out of gear for millions of families. In these conditions, it is imperative to stop hoping to pursue old ideas about schools and education. Needless to say, the process of teaching and learning need to be realigned to suit the current situation.



We cannot build a protective bubble around our children and hope to get them mentally strong. Challenges will come fast and furious, so we have to empower the youngsters in such a way that they are able to look the challenge in the eye and deal with it.

How will VUCA impact our landscape – of teaching and learning? The people in a school community include children, teachers, parents, principals, managements and the larger community. Challenging times require some drastic changes. There is a need for a paradigm shift in approach – from teacher-centred to learner-centred, from textbook to real world. It is important to put the textbook lesson in the context of the real world. If a teacher enters the classroom and straightaway launches into the lesson, without a brief interaction to gauge the mood of the class, in all probability the students might feel disconnected and lose interest in the lesson. As a consequence, the teacher will have a completely demotivated class on hand.

The VUCA impact on children puts them in a traumatic condition. Most of them try either to overcome or to escape it. So when the children troop into the class one should not expect them to be in the perfect frame of mind for the knowledge transfer to take place. Rather the onus is on the

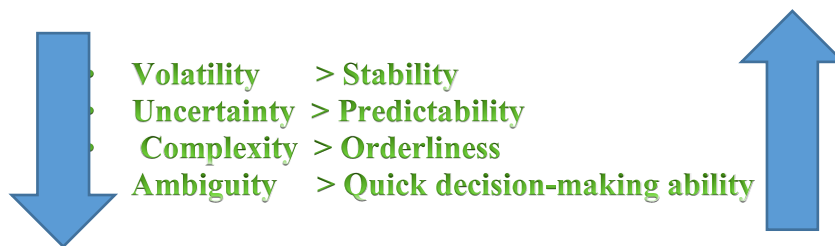


² <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/global-peace-index-2016-there-are-now-only-10-countries-in-the-world-that-are-not-at-war-a7069816.html>

teacher to first help the students reconcile the things that are impacting them. The teacher may refer to a current incident that has taken place in the city, town or village, and get children to talk about what happened. Thus the students will be able to free themselves from any tension or distraction affecting them, and concentrate on the lesson.

Children in the class might be facing serious issues like disharmony in family life, financial struggles, or even abuses by people close to them. Their brains process the stress of all these throughout the day. Such students are likely to be depressed, and in extreme condition, may skip school, adding to the problems they are already loaded with. People in such a state of mind usually feel worthless, start questioning the purpose of their life, and might resort to violence of some form, hurting others as well as themselves.

Eliminating the VUCA impact: Needless to say, counselling is required for students suffering from the impact of VUCA. Teachers should help the learners identify the problem and then guide them to choose confidence over insecurity. Volatility has to be responded with stability, uncertainty with predictability and clarity, complexity and chaos with orderliness, and ambiguity with quick decision-making ability and agility. When the students see that they have the power to bring things to order in their life, they are likely to be more responsive and attentive to the classroom lessons. Teachers have to make the student feel less helpless and more in control. VUCA can be replaced with SPOQ as explained in the following chart.



Social media is one of the by-products of the digital revolution. But it has its curses. Students spending time on social media often get carried away by other's success and start blaming their own luck for not getting what they desire. Such lack of self-esteem can be the breeding ground for failure. To counter this, teachers should read them inspiring real life stories of other children. The example of Greta Thunberg, a fifteen-year-old Swedish girl, can be given. She shot into fame in August 2018 when she decided to protest



Malala Yousafzai

outside the Swedish Parliament against global warming. This climate change warrior has triggered a worldwide movement called *School strike for climate*. Her story would be a great inspiration to the children of her age. Apart from her, there is Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan who defied the Talibans in her writings in favour of education of girls, survived an assassination attempt, and went on to win the Nobel Prize for Peace.

Teachers have to help children identify their strengths and abilities and harness them in a way that they can make a contribution to family, school or the society at large. If every child has the opportunity to do that from a young age, there would be less unhappiness, less violence and crime, and the world would likely become a better place to live.

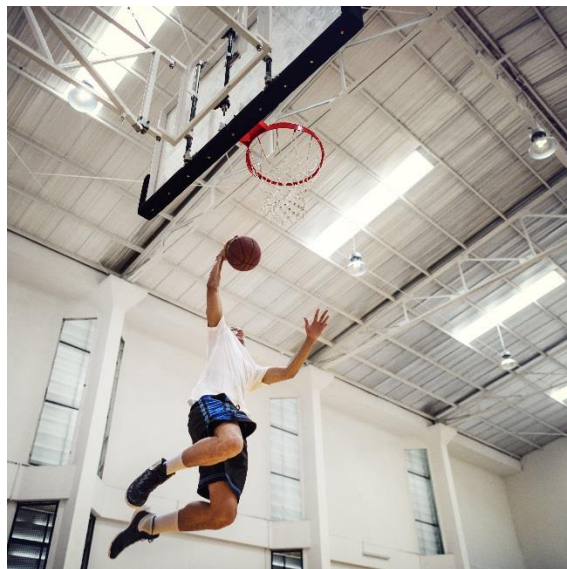
Sujata C is a writer and editor with more than thirty years of experience. She writes on children, environment, society as well as technology. She has also been a copywriter with an advertising agency for almost fifteen years.

Lesson Plan: Growing up in a VUCA world

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Staying strong when things around get shaky is a skill that can be developed. Mental strength does not mean suppressing emotions or being tough. Teachers should take the following measures to help students learn the coping strategies for surviving in a VUCA world.

1. Make sure students get enough physical exercise, be it at the gym or playground. Physical fitness is required to manage the different kinds of stress that are part of the VUCA world.
2. Arrange sessions of meditation to develop self-esteem that helps students stay calm and strong under stressful conditions.
3. Get students involved in different activities. Ask them to express their feelings about any significant incident through drawing, painting or writing.
4. Help children find trustworthy friends. People often draw strength from their close circle during any crisis.
5. Teach students to accept failures as normal rather than feeling defeated, because failure is nothing but a step towards success.



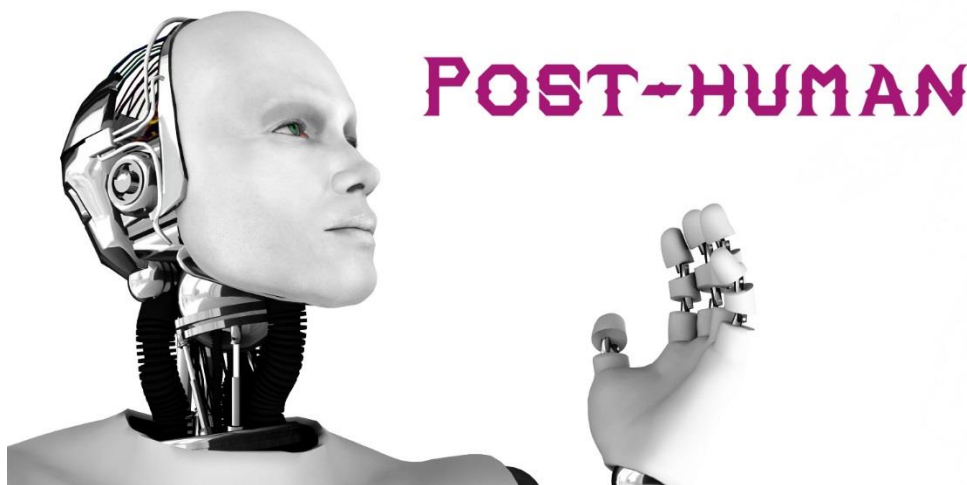
6. Help children develop a good reading habit. Recommend them books from library as per their level.

7. Encourage students to get involved in different acts of altruism. Making others feel good can make us happy as it is contagious.. Let children choose the acts of their liking.
8. Encourage them to make a scrapbook that includes all achievements and good memories of their life. They can go through it when they feel down.
9. Have your class watch inspirational films, like the documentary *He Named me Malala*, on the life of Malala Yousafzai.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_v0yqOaTqk,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1IKxO11D8o>
10. Let students regularly play games that require quick thinking, memory, reason and logic.

Apart from all these mentioned above, age appropriate counselling for students is required if any accident, natural calamity or act of violence disturbs them.

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Post-human (used as *adjective* and *noun*)



Pronunciation: /,pəʊst'hju:mən/

Meaning:

As adjective

1. Chiefly Science Fiction. Of or relating to a hypothetical species that might evolve from human beings, as by means of genetic or bionic augmentation.
2. Designating or relating to art, music, etc., in which humanity or human concerns are regarded as peripheral or absent; abstract, impersonal, mechanistic, dispassionate.

As noun

Science Fiction. A member of a hypothetical species that might evolve from human beings.

Origin and additional information: The word originated in the early 20th century from the words, *post* and *human*. One of the main loci of meaning for this term is Donna Haraway's 1984 essay *A Cyborg Manifesto*, where she expressed *the utopian dream of the hope for a monstrous world without gender*. At that time the essay was quite influential, even though it seemed a little crazy. It depicted a world without gender, a world of freeform identities manifested through a radical and joyful embrace of modern technologies, and was pure science fiction. But it seems that history has caught up with the author, for our identities now extend into cyberspace in many ways, we no longer merely rely on our brain cells but now

store much of our knowledge in technological clouds that function as extensions of our minds. It sometimes feels like we are only a few steps away from being *cyborgs* in the truest sense of the term.

Word section: Haraway's cyborg is in many ways the beta version of the post-human, as her cyborg theory prompted the issue to be taken up in critical theory. Following Haraway, Hayles, whose work grounds much of the critical post-human discourse, asserts that liberal humanism—which separates the mind from the body and thus portrays the body as a *shell* or vehicle for the mind—becomes increasingly complicated in the late 20th and 21st centuries because information technology puts the human body in question. Hayles maintains that we must be conscious of information technology advancements while understanding information as *disembodied*, i.e., something which cannot fundamentally replace the human body but can only be incorporated into it and human life practices.

Usage:

1. *An animal no longer human, or for that matter mammalian, in its character... But even if such a **post-human** animal did come into existence, it is difficult to believe that it could carry on the necessary economic activities without using a certain amount of formal organization.*

(Source: ***Poverty and Social Progress*** by Maurice Parmelee, 1916)

2. *A **posthuman** who had once been flesh and blood until he'd relinquished his humanity to have his mind downloaded into cyborg form, becoming an immortal intellect.*

(Source: ***Asimov's Science Fiction***, an American science fiction magazine, by Allen M. Steele, 2002)

Contents sourced majorly from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary