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USDLA Journal

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February 2002 | ISSN 1537-5080 | Vol. 16 : No. 2

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EDITOR'S PODIUM

Begging the Question or Odd Man Out

Dr. Elizabeth Perrin, Journal Editor

Authenticity is hard to come by, sometimes even in Academia. We have been concerned with the plethora of self-diagnostic questionnaires on student readiness for online Distance Learning courses. These questionnaires are designed to focus student understanding and provide analyses of DL requirements in the technical (hardware) and psychological/social (humanware) areas to determine whether a student would have reasonable expectations for success as a DL student. It is our observation that these questions, for the most part, have about as much veracity in determining whether a student would do well in Distance Learning as declaring that one would like pickles if one had had eaten cucumbers although that person had never tasted either vinegar or salt.

A little pragmatism here would do a world of good. Some questionnaires like those on the Illinois Online Network and Online Learning, University of San Diego come right up front and score with a genuine concern that, to be a successful online Distance Learning student, the student must have access to a computer, the Internet and a phone line. USD is head and shoulders above many other surveys in asking whether the student knows how to use a computer and PBS does well and puts some things in perspective with its question about the immediate and imperative student need for the course.

Our concern is the "humanware" (our word) arena. We have yet to see any substantive research that supports the following ever present implied dependent relationships to assess likelihood of student success in DL.

A student's need to feel part of a class is a more significant indicator of probable failure as a Distance Learning student than of probable failure in a F2F class.

Lack of immediate instructor feed back is more significant to a distance learner that to an on campus learner.

Tendency to procrastinate is more indicative of probable failure in a DL class than in an on campus class.

Reluctance to contact an instructor for help in a timely manner is more likely to cause failure for a Distance Learner than for an on campus student.

If class discussion is helpful to a student, the student is not a likely candidate for success in Distance Learning (implicit is the assumption that class discussion is lacking in DL).

If exploring new things is appealing, a student is more likely to be successful as a distance learner.

(Does this imply that, if this kind of learning exploration is not appealing to a student, the student is advised to stick with a F2F situation?).

Going to class in pajamas is better than commuting to campus - (that these criteria are indicators of likely success for the Distance Learning student mandates absolute suspension of academic judgment!)

If a student feels that often an immediate answer is not his or her best answer, the time delay in Distance Learning would be advantageous. (Doesn't this indicate a possible need for some redesign in question and answer activity in on campus classes rather than an inherent aptitude for Distance Learning?). And, ***my personal favorite,***

If a student thinks that sharing work, life and education experiences will bring about increased learning, that student is likely to be a successful Distance Learning student. This implies that if a student does not believe this, then that student is not a good prospect for Distance Learning and would be well advised to stick with on campus classes where, presumably, such sharing will not take place to impede the progress of learning.

Seriously, friends, colleagues, and fellow distance learners, we need to sweep the corners of our towers with a little more rigorous broom.

In Memoriam

Shirley M. Davis

Shirley, our beloved colleague, friend, mentor passed away Sunday, February 10th, 2002. Shirley worked long and tirelessly on behalf of Distance Learning and in support of bringing the very best learning experiences to students of all ages, wherever they were. Shirley was Director of Learning Innovations for PBS Adult Learning Service and PBS TeacherLine. She was Past-President of the United States Distance Learning Association and founding member and Past-President of the Washington Metropolitan Distance Learning Association. Shirley has been a highly respected leader within the Distance Learning movement for the past 20 years and was a major force in the advancement of Distance Learning. She will be sorely missed by all of us who had the joy and excitement of knowing and working with her.

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Editor's Note: The content and technology are continually changing. This article reminds us that learners are also changing. For the past decade, faculty who won awards for teaching expressed concern that they could no longer hold the attention of their students. John Seely Brown, Chief Scientist at Xerox and director of its Palo Alto Research Center, hired 15 year olds to design future work environments and learning environments. He observed that the students did not conform to the traditional image of learners as permissive sponges. It requires us to rethink and redesign education for the Digital Age.

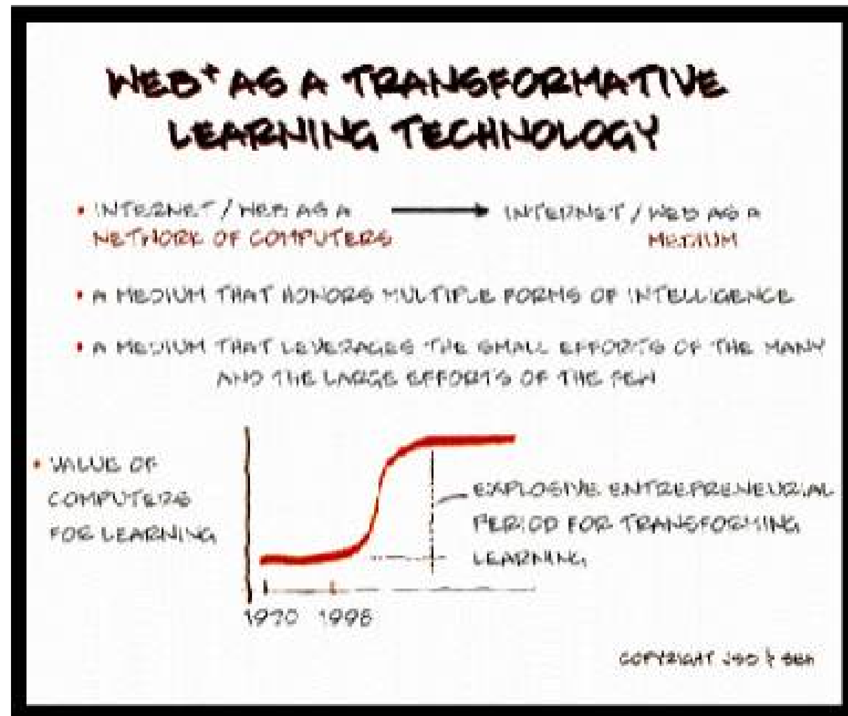
GROWING UP DIGITAL

How the Web Changes Work, Education, and the Ways People Learn

John Seely Brown

John S. Dykes Illustration, Inc, jsd1@optonline.net

In 1831 Michael Faraday built a small generator that produced electricity, but a generation passed before an industrial version was built, then another 25 years before all the necessary accoutrements for electrification came into place-power companies, neighborhood wiring, appliances (like light bulbs) that required electricity, and so on. But when that infrastructure finally took hold, everything changed-homes, work places, transportation, entertainment, architecture, what we ate, even when we went to bed. Worldwide, electricity became a transformative medium for social practices.



In quite the same way, the World Wide Web will be a transformative medium, as important as electricity. Here again we have a story of gradual development followed by an exploding impact. The Web's antecedents trace back to a U.S. Department of Defense project begun in the late 1960s, then to the innovations of Tim Berners-Lee and others at the Center for European Nuclear Research in the late 1980s, followed by rapid adoption in the mid- and late-1990s. Suddenly we had e-mail available, then a new way to look up information, then a remarkable way to do our shopping-but that's barely the start. The tremendous range of transformations wrought by electricity, so barely sensed by our grandparents a century ago, lie ahead of us through the Web.

No one fully knows what those transformations will be, but what we do know is that initial uses of new media have tended to mimic what came before: early photography imitated painting, the first movies the stage, etc. It took 10 to 20 years for filmmakers to discover the inherent capabilities of their new medium. They were to develop techniques now commonplace in movies, such as "fades," "dissolves," "flashbacks," "time and space folds," and "special effects," all radically different from what had been possible in the theater. So it will be for the Web. What we initially saw as an intriguing network of computers is now evolving its own genres from a mix of technological possibilities and social and market needs.

Challenging as it is, this article will try to look ahead to understand the Web's fundamental properties; see how they might create a new kind of information fabric in which learning, working, and playing co-mingle; examine the notion of distributed intelligence; ask how one might better capture and leverage naturally occurring knowledge assets; and finally get to our core topic-how all of this might fold together into a new concept of "learning ecology." Along the way, too, we'll look frequently at learning itself and ask not only how it occurs now, but how it can become ubiquitous in the future.

A New Medium

The first thing to notice is that the media we're all familiar with-from books to television-are one-way propositions: they push their content *at* us. The Web is two-way, push *and pull.* In finer point, it combines the one-way reach of broadcast with the two-way reciprocity of a mid-cast. Indeed, its user can at once be a receiver and sender of "broadcast"-a confusing property, but mind-stretching!

A second aspect of the Web is that it is the first medium that honors the notion of multiple intelligences. This past century's concept of "literacy" grew out of our intense belief in text, a focus enhanced by the power of one particular technology-the typewriter. It became a great tool for writers but a terrible one for other creative activities such as sketching, painting, notating music, or even mathematics. The typewriter prized one particular kind of intelligence, but with the Web, we suddenly have a medium that honors multiple forms of intelligence-abstract, textual, visual, musical, social, and kinesthetic. As educators, we now have a chance to construct a medium that enables all young people to become engaged in their ideal way of learning. The Web affords the match we need between a medium and how a particular person learns.

A third and unusual aspect of the Web is that it leverages the small efforts of the many with the large efforts of the few. For example, researchers in the Maricopa County Community College system in Phoenix have found a way to link a set of senior citizens with pupils in the Longview Elementary School, as helper-mentors. It's wonderful to see-kids listen to these "grandparents" better than they do to their own parents, the mentoring really helps their teachers, and the seniors create a sense of meaning for themselves. Thus, the small efforts of the many-the seniors-complement the large efforts of the few-the teachers.

The same thing can be found in operation at Hewlett-Packard, where engineers use the Web to help kids with science or math problems. Both of these examples barely scratch the surface as we think about what's possible when we start interlacing resources with needs across a whole region.

The Web has just begun to have an impact on our lives. As fascinated as we are with it today, we're still seeing it in its early forms. We've yet to see the full motion video and audio possibilities that await the bandwidth we'll soon have through cable modems and DSL; also to come are the new Web appliances, such as the portable Web in a phone, and a host of wireless technologies. As important as any of these is the imagination, competitive drive, and capital behind a thousand companies-chased by a swelling list of dot-coms-rushing to bring new content, services, and "solutions" to offices and homes.

My belief is that not only will the Web be as fundamental to society as electrification, but that it will be subject to many of the same diffusion and absorption dynamics as that earlier medium. We're just at the bottom of the S -curve of this innovation, a curve that will have about the same shape as with electrification, but a much steeper slope than before. As this S-curve takes off, it creates huge opportunities for entrepreneurs. It will be entrepreneurs, corporate or academic, who will drive this chaotic, transformative phenomenon, who will see things differently, challenge background assumptions, and bring new possibilities into being. Our challenge and opportunity, then, is to foster an entrepreneurial spirit toward creating new *learning* environments-a spirit that will use the unique capabilities of the Web to leverage the natural ways that humans learn.

Digital Learners

Let's turn to today's youth, growing up digital. How are they different? This subject matters, because our young boys and girls are today's customers for schools and colleges and tomorrow's for lifelong learning. Approximately four years ago, we at Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center started hiring 15 year olds to join us as researchers. We gave them two jobs. First, they were to design the "workscape" of the future-one they'd want to work in; second, they were to design the school or "learningscape" of the future-again, with the same condition. We had an excellent opportunity to watch these adolescents, and what we saw the ways they think, the designs they came up with-really shook us up.

For example, today's kids are always "multiprocessing"-they do several things simultaneously-listen to music, talk on the cell phone, and use the computer, all at the same time. Recently I was with a young twenty-something who had actually wired a Web browser into his eyeglasses. As he talked with me, he had his left hand in his pocket to cord in keystrokes to bring up my Web page and read about me, all the while carrying on with his part of the conversation! I was astonished that he could do all this in parallel and so unobtrusively.

People my age tend to think that kids who are multiprocessing can't be concentrating. That may not be true. Indeed, one of the things we noticed is that the attention span of the teens at PARC-often between 30 seconds and five minutes-parallels that of top managers, who operate in a world of fast context-switching. So the short attention spans of today's kids may turn out to be far from dysfunctional for future work worlds.

Let me bring together our findings by presenting a set of dimensions, and shifts along them, that describe kids in the digital age. We present these dimensions in turn, but they actually fold in on each other, creating a complex of intertwined cognitive skills.

The first dimensional shift has to do with literacy and how it is evolving. Literacy today involves not only text, but also image and screen literacy. The ability to "read" multimedia texts and to feel comfortable with new, multiple-media genres is decidedly nontrivial. We've long downplayed this ability; we tend to think that watching a movie, for example, requires no particular skill. If, however, you'd been left out of society for 10 years and then came back and saw a movie, you'd find it a very confusing, even jarring, experience. The network news shows-even the front page of your daily newspaper-are all very different from 10 years ago. Yet Web genres change in a *period of* months.

The new literacy, beyond text and image, is one of information navigation. The real literacy of tomorrow entails the ability to be your own personal reference librarian-to know how to navigate through confusing, complex information spaces and feel comfortable doing so. "Navigation" may well be the main form of literacy for the 21st century.

The next dimension, and shift, concerns learning. Most of us experienced formal learning in an authority-based, lecture-oriented school. Now, with incredible amounts of information available through the Web, we find a "new" kind of learning assuming pre-eminence-learning that's discovery based. We are constantly discovering new things as we browse through the emergent digital "libraries." Indeed, Web surfing fuses learning and entertainment, creating "infotainment."

But discovery-based learning, even when combined with our notion of navigation, is not so great a

change, until we add a third, more subtle shift, one that pertains to forms of reasoning. Classically, reasoning has been concerned with the deductive and abstract. But our observation of kids working with digital media suggests *bricolage* to us more than abstract logic. *Bricolage,* a concept studied by Claude Levi-Strauss more than a generation ago, relates to the concrete. It has to do with abilities to find something-an object, tool, document, a piece of code-and to use it to build something you deem important. *Judgment* is inherently critical to becoming an effective digital *bricoleur.*

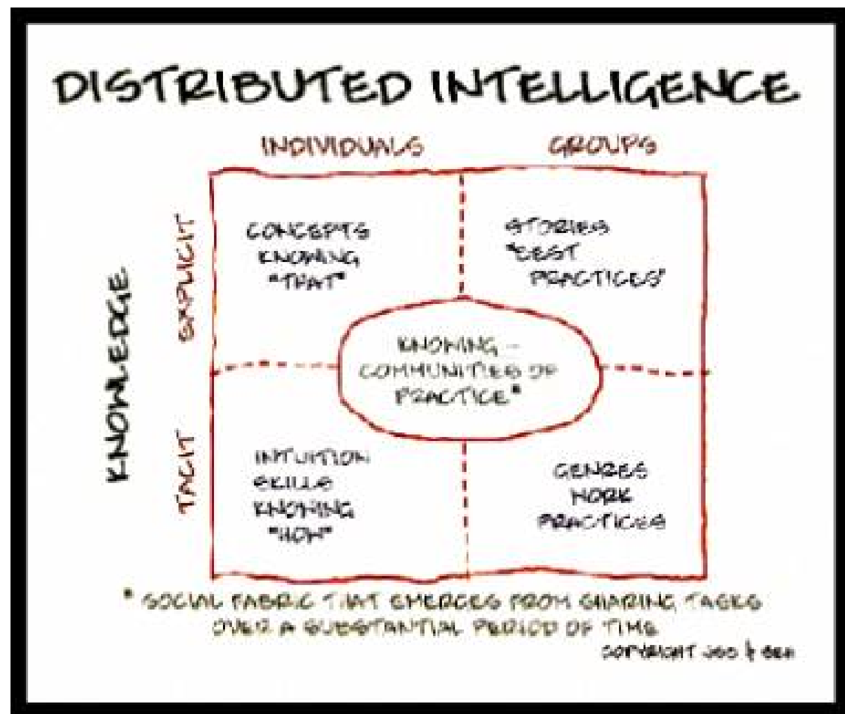
How do we make good judgments? Socially, in terms of recommendations from people we trust? Cognitively, based on rational argumentation? On the reputation of a sponsoring institution? What's the mixture of ways and warrants that you end up using to decide and act? With the Web, the sheer scope and variety of resources befuddles the non-digital adult. But Web-smart kids learn to become *bricoleurs.*

The final dimension has to do with a bias toward action. It's interesting to watch how new systems get absorbed by society; with the Web, this absorption, or learning process, by young people has been quite different from the process in times past. My generation tends not to want to try things unless or until we already know how to use them. If we don't know how to use some appliance or software, our instinct is to reach for a manual or take a course or call up an expert. Believe me, hand a manual or suggest a course to 15 year olds and they think you are a dinosaur. They want to turn the thing on, get in there, muck around, and see what works. Today's kids get on the Web and link, lurk, and watch how other people are doing things, then try it themselves. This tendency toward "action" brings us back into the same loop in which navigation, discovery, and judgment all come into play *in situ*. When, for example, have we lurked enough to try something ourselves? Once we fold action into the other dimensions, we necessarily shift our focus toward learning *in situ* with and from each other. Learning becomes situated in action; it becomes as much social as cognitive, it is concrete rather than abstract, and it becomes intertwined with judgment and exploration. As such, the Web becomes not only an informational and social resource but a learning *medium* where understandings are socially constructed and shared. In that medium, learning becomes a part of action and knowledge creation.

Creating Knowledge

To see how all these dimensions work, it's necessary to look at knowledge-its creation and sharing-from both the standard Cartesian position and that of the *bricoleur.* Knowledge has two dimensions, the explicit and tacit. The explicit dimension deals with concepts-the

"know-whats"-whereas the tacit deals with "know-how," which is best manifested in work practices and skills. Since the tacit lives in action, it comes alive in and through doing things, in participation with each other in the world. As a consequence, tacit knowledge can be distributed among people as a shared understanding that emerges from working together, a point we will return to.



The developmental psychologist Jerome Bruner made a brilliant observation years ago when he said we can teach people about a subject matter like physics-its concepts, conceptual frameworks, its facts-and provide them with explicit knowledge of the field, but *being* a physicist involves a lot more than getting all the answers right at the end of each chapter. To be a physicist, we must also learn the practices of the field, the tacit knowledge in the community of physicists that has to do with things like what constitutes an "interesting" question, what proof may be "good enough" or even "elegant," the rich interplay between facts and theory-formation, and so on. Learning to be a physicist (as opposed to learning about physics) requires cutting a column down the middle of the diagram, looking at the deep interplay between the tacit and explicit. That's where deep expertise lies. Acquiring this expertise requires learning the explicit knowledge of a field, the practices of its community, and the interplay between the two. And learning all this requires immersion in a community of practice, enculturation in its ways of seeing, interpreting, and acting.

The epistemic landscape is more complicated yet because both the tacit and explicit dimensions of knowledge apply not only to the individual but also to the social mind to what we've called communities of practice. It's common for us to think that all knowledge resides in individual heads, but when we factor in the tacit dimension-especially as it relates to practices-we quickly realize how much more we can know than is bounded by our own knowledge. Much of knowing is brought forth in action, through participation-in the world, with other people, around real problems. A lot of our know-how or knowing comes into being through participating in our community(ies) of practice.

Understanding how intelligence is distributed across a broader matrix becomes increasingly critical if we want to leverage "learning to learn," because learning to learn happens most naturally when you and a participant are situated in a community of practice. Returning to Bruner's notion of learning to be, recall that it always involves processes of enculturation. Enculturation lies at the heart of learning. It also lies at the heart of knowing. Knowing has as much to do with picking up the genres of a particular profession as it does with learning its facts and concepts.

Curiously, academics' values tend to put theory at the top in importance, with the grubbiness of

practice at the bottom. But think about what you do when you get a PhD. The last two years of most doctoral programs are actually spent in close work with professors, *doing* the discipline with them; these years in effect become a cognitive apprenticeship. Note that this comes after formal course work, which imparted relevant facts and conceptual frameworks. Those frameworks act as scaffolding to help structure the practice developed through the apprenticeship. So learning *in situ* and cognitive apprenticeship fold together in this notion of distributed intelligence.

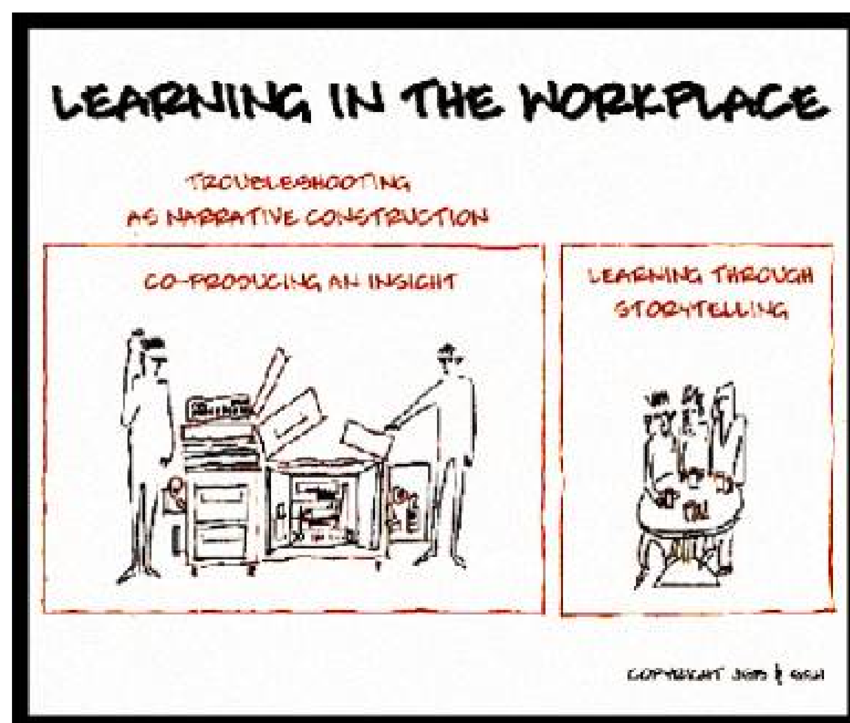
I dwell on this point because each of us has various techniques, mostly invisible, that we use day in and day out to learn with and from each other *in situ*. This is seen all the time on a campus, where students develop techniques for learning that span in-class and out-of-class experiences-all of campus life is about learning how to learn. Colleges should appreciate and support such learning; the key to doing so lies in understanding the dynamic flow in our two-by-two matrix.

If we could use the Web to support the dynamics across these quadrants, we could create a new fabric for learning, for learning to learn *in situ*, for that is the essence of lifelong learning.

Repairing Photocopiers

Talk about a "two-by-two conceptual framework of distributed intelligence" can be terribly abstract; let me bring this to life, and move our argument ahead, with a story from the company where I work. When I arrived at Xerox, back in the 1980s, the company was spending millions and millions of dollars a year training its 23,000 "tech reps" around the world-the people who repair its copiers and printers. Lots of that training-it was like classroom instruction seemed to have little effect. Xerox wanted me to come up with some intelligent-tutoring or artificial-intelligence system for teaching these people troubleshooting. Fortunately, before we did so, we hired several anthropologists to go live in their "tribe" and see how they actually worked.

What the anthropologists learned surprised us. When a tech rep got stuck by a machine, he or she didn't look at the manual or review the training; he or she called another tech rep. As the two of them stood over the problematic machine, they'd recall earlier machines and fixes, then connect those stories to a new one that explained some of the symptoms. Some fragment of the initial story would remind them of another incident, which suggested a new measurement or tweak, which reminded them of another story fragment and fix to try, and so on. Troubleshooting for these people, then, really meant construction of a narrative, one that finally explained the symptoms and test data and got the machine up and running again. Abstract, logical reasoning wasn't the way they went about it; stories were.



This example demonstrates the crucial role of tacit knowledge (in the form of stories) within a community of practice (the tech reps). But the anthropologists had more to tell us. What happened to these stories? When the reps got back to the home office, awaiting the next call, they'd sit around and play cribbage, drink coffee, and swap war stories. Amazing amounts of learning were happening in the telling and hearing of these stories. In the telling, a story got refined, added to, argued about, and stored away for use.

Today, brain scientists have helped us understand more about the architecture of the mind and how it is particularly well suited to remembering stories. That's the happy part. The sad part is that some Xerox executives thought storytelling had to be a waste of time; big posters told the reps, "Don't tell war stories!" Instead, people were sent back for more training. When people returned from it, what did they do? Tell stories about the training, of course, in attempts to transform what they'd been told into something more useful.

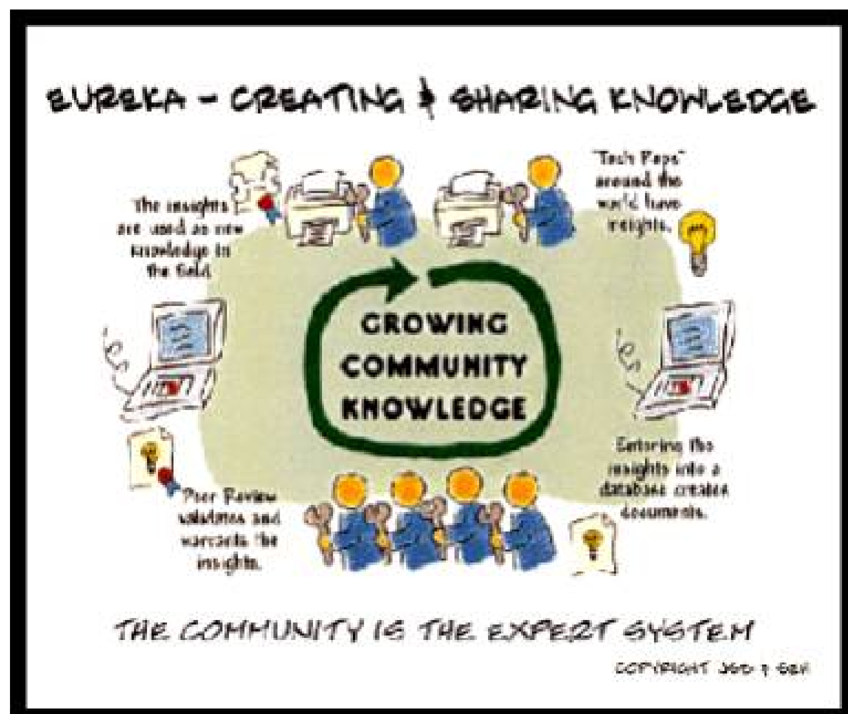
Let me add here that these studies convinced us that for powerful learning to occur, you had to look to both the cognitive and the social dimensions. They also led us to ask, How can we leverage this naturally occurring learning?

Our answer to that question was simple: two-way radios. We gave everybody in our tech rep "community of practice" test site a radio that was always on, with their own private network. Because the radios were al-ways on, the reps were constantly in each other's periphery. When somebody needed help, other tech reps would hear him struggling; when one of them had an idea, he or she could move from the periphery to the (auditory) center, usually to suggest some test or part to replace, adding his or her fragment to an evolving story. Basically, we created a multiperson storytelling process running across the test site. It worked incredibly well.

In fact, it also turned out to be a powerful way to bring new technicians into this community. A novice could lurk on the periphery and hear what was going on, learn from it, maybe ask a question, and eventually make a suggestion when he or she had something to contribute. In effect, the newcomer was a cognitive apprentice, moving from lurker to contributor, very much like today's digital kids on the Web.

The trouble with this scenario is that all these story fragments were being told through the ether, and hence were lost to those reps not participating at the moment. Some of these fragments were real gems! So we needed to find a way to collect, vet, refine, and post them on a community knowledge server. Furthermore, we realized that no one person was the expert; the real expertise resided in the community mind. If we could find a way to support and tap the collective minds of the reps, we'd have a whole new way to accelerate their learning and structure the community's knowledge assets in the making. We wanted to accomplish this, too, with virtually no overhead.

The answer for us was a new, Web-based system called Eureka, which we've had in use for two years now. The interesting thing is that the tech reps, in co-designing this system to make their ideas and stories more actionable, unwittingly reinvented the sociology of science. In reality, they knew many of the ideas and story fragments that floated around were not trustworthy; they were just opinions, sometimes crazy. To transform their opinions and experiences into "warranted" beliefs, hence actionable, contributors had to submit their ideas for peer review, a process facilitated by the Web. The peers would quickly vet and refine the story, and connect it to others. In addition, the author attaches his or her name to the resulting story or tip, thus creating both intellectual capital and social capital, the latter because tech reps who create really great stories become local heroes and hence more central members of their community of practice.



This system has changed the learning curve of our tech reps by 300 percent and will save Xerox about $100 million a year. It is also, for our purposes here, a beautiful example of how the Web enables us to capture and support the social mind and naturally occurring knowledge assets.

Building Knowledge Assets

What are some other emergent ideas-in the workplace or on campus-that might help us capture, refine, and share knowledge assets in the making? Are there ways to capture as sets that are left just lying on the table, as it were, and use them to make learning more productive in classrooms, firms, even a region? The answer, now, is yes. Here are two examples, among many I've seen around the country, especially as entrepreneurs start to see this as ripe territory.

The first example I encountered was at Stanford University. It comes from Professor Jim Gibbons, the former dean of engineering. He discovered the basis of building knowledge assets accidentally some years ago and has been refining it since. Jim had been teaching an engineering course that enrolled several Hewlett-Packard people. Partway through the course, the H-P students were transferred and were no longer physically able to come to class. What Jim did was simply videotape the classes and send them the tapes.

The twist, though, is that once the engineers received the video they'd replay it in their own small study group, but in a special way. Every three minutes or so they'd stop the tape and talk about what they'd just seen, ask each other if there were any questions or ambiguities, and resolve them on the spot. Forward they would go, a few minutes at a time, with lots of talk and double-checking, until they were through the tape and everybody understood the whole lesson. What they were doing, in terms we used earlier, was socially constructing their own meaning of the material.

The results were that students taking the course this way outperformed the ones actually taking the classes live. Today, the approach has been tried with other H-P engineers, with college students, even with California prison inmates; most of the students who've tried it got half a grade point better grades than the regular students. This account is not meant as a commentary on regular Stanford classes! Rather, it is used to describe an elegantly simple idea, low-tech and low-cost, about how forming study groups and letting them socially construct their own understanding around a naturally occurring knowledge asset the lecture-turns out to be an amazingly powerful tool for learning. Think about what this suggests for distance learning-or for on-campus students.

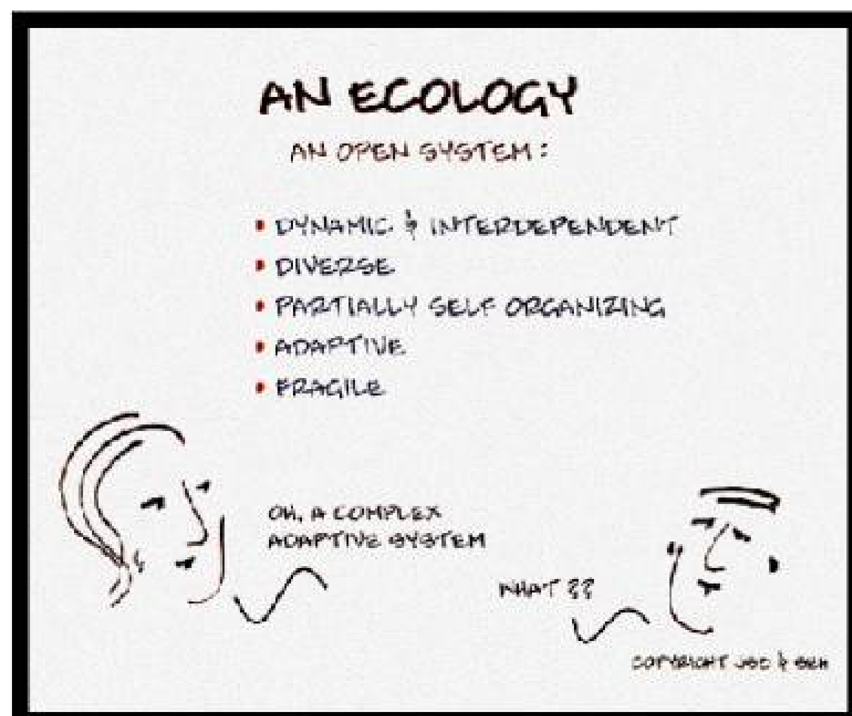
The second example stems from research being done both at PARC and Cornell University. The PARC system is called Madcap and looks to see how we might leverage a knowledge asset, our

weekly forums, where we often get some wonderful outside speakers. These forum events have proved a valuable stimulus to the whole Silicon Valley region. Of course we make videotapes and give them to people who miss a session. In reality, though, hardly anyone ever replays the tapes because it's very hard to skim through a video stream for the highlights you want. So we asked, Might it be possible to use computers to automatically segment and highlight a video stream? Perhaps even summarize it?

We now have a prototype system for doing this designed by Dan Russell's group at PARC. First we capture and store the digital video on a media server, which also marks and time-stamps any uniquely identifiable event such as clapping, laughing, a slide change, and so on. Audience members can also use their laptops or Palm Pilots to take notes; these can be time-stamped and thus cross-indexed into the video stream. We also transcribe the audio stream. All these "signals" are combined to make a soup of streams, all cross-indexed with each other. The resulting mixture becomes a very rich medium in which it's possible to skim and pick out highlights on your own. Or you can spot where a colleague made an annotation, see and hear the moment, then see what he or she thought about it.

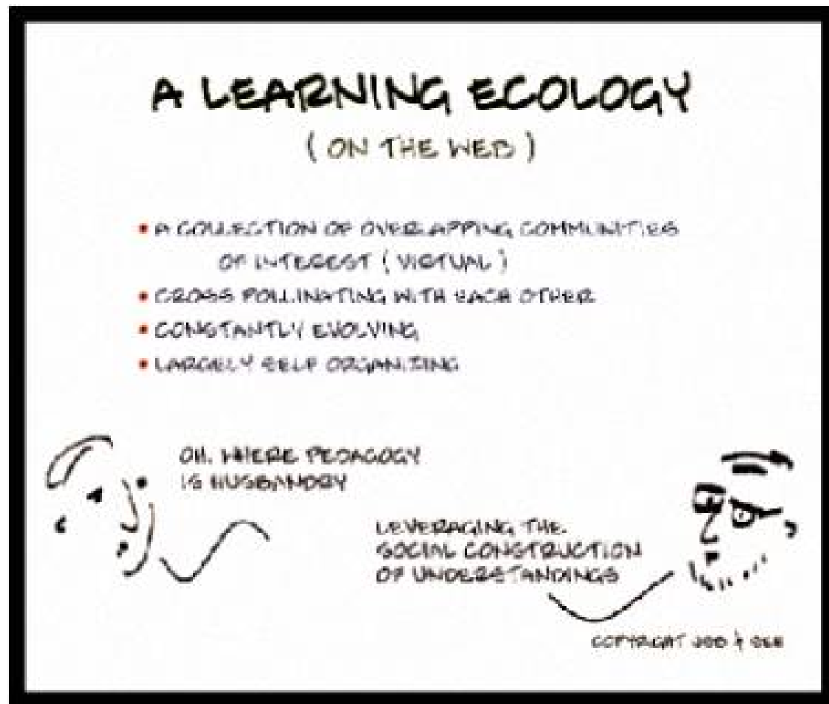
This last point intrigues us: can you capture the additional signals generated by the audience-the notes, approvals, or disagreements recorded as the lecture progressed and use these signals as structural indices to the video stream? The goal is to make this a richer knowledge asset than just the video alone, so that browsing, reflection, and focused conversations are more likely to happen. If you have a diverse set of individuals taking notes and they are willing to identify themselves, you start to create an ecology of annotations-diverse, overlapping, richly opinionated.

The goal, again, is to transform a lecture-a fleeting performance that only some people will experience-into a knowledge asset and tool for deeper learning among a greater number of people. At Cornell, Dan Hattenlocher's research team has added dual video cameras to the mix, one on the lecturer and one that zooms in on the student posing a question, to further enrich the segmenting and indexing of material on the tape. At PARC and Cornell alike, the aim of these tag structures is to transform the lecture into a more structured and useful knowledge asset. Of course this new asset, when viewed and vetted by subsequent audiences, becomes part of another knowledge performance (and knowledge sharing), leading to additional layers of cumulative annotation as its meaning gets further socially constructed.



Toward a Learning Ecology

An ecology is basically an open, complex, adaptive system comprising elements that are dynamic and interdependent. One of the things that makes an ecology so powerful and adaptive to new environments is its diversity. Recall that with the prior examples of knowledge performances, it was the diversity of comments that gave texture to the knowledge asset and enabled it to be used in ways that might never have been originally imagined.



Let's consider a learning ecology, particularly one that might form around or on the Web. As a start down this path, consider the Web as comprising a vast number of "authors" who are members of various interest groups, many of which embody a lot of expertise in both written and tacit form. Given the vastness of the Web, it's easy these days to find a niche community with the expertise you need or a special interest group whose interests coincide exactly with your own.

Recall the famous *New Yorker* cartoon of a dog in front of a computer, saying, "On the `Net nobody knows you are a dog." Online, a kid need not necessarily reveal himself as a kid. Indeed, I've watched a seven year old from New York have a conversation about penguins with an expert at a university in another state. The professor may have sensed that the person he was talking with wasn't a real expert on penguins, but he probably didn't know he was communicating with a second-grader, either. Furthermore, at this child's school there was no one, including his teachers, who shared his interest in penguins. He found the right interest group through navigation. He linked, he lurked, he finally asked a question, and had this brief conversation with an expert. And I can tell you, the professor's momentary effort truly inspired him.

With the Web, these virtual communities of niche interests spread around the world as they interweave with local, face-to-face groups, in school or outside. A new, powerful fabric for learning starts to emerge, drawing strength from the local and the global. A cross-pollination of ideas happens as local students, participating in different virtual communities, carry ideas back and forth between those communities and their local ones.

Now recall our emphasis that informal learning often involves the joint construction of understanding around a focal point of interest, and one begins to sense how these cross-linked interest groups, both real and virtual, form a rich ecology for learning. Of course not all these conversations, even if focused and well intended, lead to productive learning. As we said earlier in discussing digital kids, judgment, navigation, discernment, and synthesis become more critical than

ever.

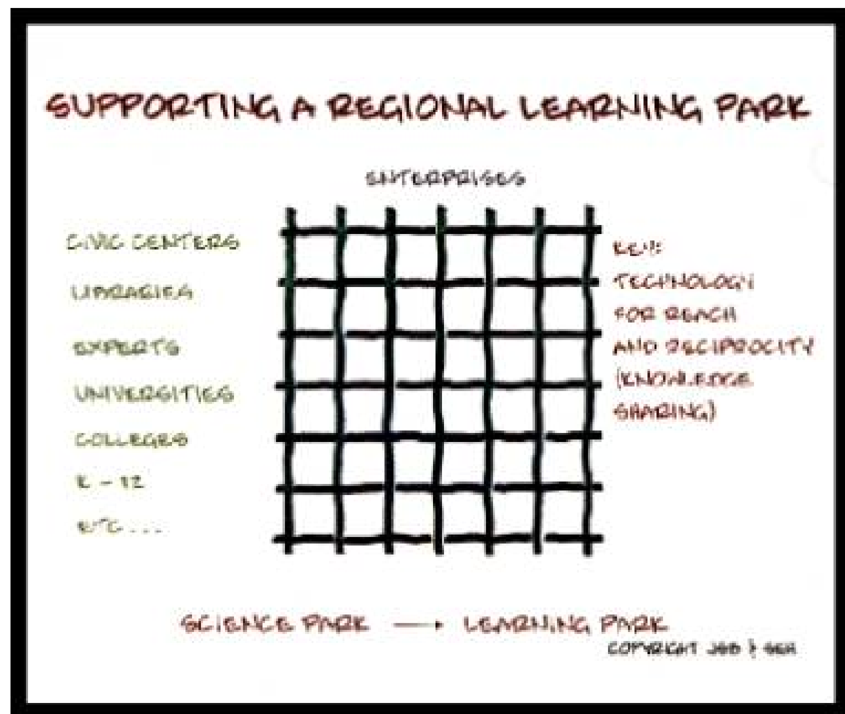
Regional Learning

I've been struck, living in Silicon Valley and spending time in other high-tech regions, by how each region can be analyzed with respect to the quality and diversity of its knowledge producers and knowledge consumers.

The classic way to view knowledge production in a region is to list all the educational institutions one can think of-universities and colleges, schools, libraries, museums, civic centers-and to see these as the region's *producers* of knowledge, with the region's citizens, students, firms, government, and voluntary organizations as their con*sumers.* The matrix on this page represents that relationship.

But in most regions I visit today, there is a rich interplay between the matrix's two axes, albeit one that seldom gets noticed. If the region is geographically compressed enough, you start to get all kinds of informal, face-to-face connections between knowledge producers and consumers-students work part-time in surrounding firms, new firms spin out of universities, employees are retrained on campus, different people frequent common hang-outs, and so on and on. In the 1970s and 1980s we were preoccupied with science parks; in the 1990s, all these connections produce what I think of as learning parks. Such learning parks bring increasingly rich intellectual and educational opportunities to their region.

If top-quality schools and universities once primed the pump for science parks, we now see learning parks pushing resources the other way. In the relation between leading-edge firms and universities, for example, the firms increasingly provide adjunct professors, guest lectures, thesis supervision, internships for students, sabbaticals for faculty, and workplace experiences for scholars of all ages. So the traditional producers of knowledge (the faculty) are also becoming consumers of the knowledge that their traditional consumers (graduate students, firms in the region) produce. This is very healthy, indeed.



Now let's overlay on top of this physical-social region the Web, and look back to the example of students participating in local, face-to-face groups but tying also into virtual ones. A key understanding is that on the Web there seldom is such a thing as just a producer or just a consumer; on the Web, each of us is part consumer and part producer. We read and we write, we absorb and

we critique, we listen and we tell stories, we help and we seek help. This is life on the Web. The boundaries be-tween consuming and producing are fluid, which is the secret to many of the business models of Web-based commerce.

From a region's standpoint, the great opportunity here is that the Web helps establish a culture that honors the fluid boundaries between the production and consumption of knowledge. It recognizes that knowledge can be produced wherever serious problems are being attacked and followed to their root. Furthermore, with the Web it is easier for various experts to interact casually-in the academy or in the firm-and to mentor or advise students of any age. On top of this, the Web's great reach provides infinite access to resources beyond the region. The power of this reach comes fully into play when Web resources act to cross-pollinate and provide new points of view for a region's communities of practice.

Within a region, the Web can significantly augment the knowledge dynamics created by proximity. The Web helps build a rich fabric that combines the small efforts of the many with the large efforts of the few. By enriching the diversity of available information and expertise, it enables the culture and sensibilities of a region to evolve. It increases the intellectual density of cross-linkages. It allows anyone to lurk and learn. Indeed its message is that learning can and should be happening everywhere-a learning ecology. All together, a new, self-catalytic system starts to emerge, reinforcing and extending the core competencies of a region.

Let me end with a brief reflection on an interesting shift that I believe is happening: a shift between using technology to support the individual to using technology to support relationships between individuals. With that shift, we will discover new tools and social protocols for helping us help each other, which is the very essence of social learning. It is also the essence of lifelong learning a form of learning that learning ecologies could dramatically facilitate. And developing learning ecologies in a region is a first, important step toward a more general culture of learning.

RESOURCES

John Seely Brown's earlier work on "situated learning" came to notice in a series of widely cited journal articles:

Brown, J.S., A. Collins, and P. Duguid. "Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning," *Educational Researcher, Vol.* 18, No. 1, 1989, pp. 32-42.

Brown, J.S. and P. Duguid, "Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation," *Organizational Science, Vol.* 2, No. 1, 1991, pp. 40-57.

Collins, A., J.S. Brown, and A. Holum, "Cognitive Apprenticeship: Making Thinking Visible," *American Educator, Vol.* 15, No. 3,1991, pp. 6-11, 38-46.

In 1993, these ideas were pulled together and critiqued in a special issue of *Educational Technology* 33, Vol. 3, which includes a further Brown-Duguid contribution on "Stolen Knowledge" (pp.10-15).

In 1996, Brown and Duguid's ideas about learning formed a centerpiece of their initial contribution to *Change,* "Universities in the Digital Age" (Vol. 28, No. 4,1996, pp. 10-19), which came to be one of the magazine's most widely read and cited pieces.

Many ideas from that and their current *Change* article appear in Brown and Duguid's splendid new book, *The Social Life of Information* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 2000).

About the Author:

John Seely Brown is the chief scientist of Xerox and director of its Palo Alto Research Center. In 1987, Brown helped found the Institute for Research on Learning (IRL), located in Menlo Park, California, a "research-in-action" think tank that probes "successful everyday learning." Brown and Duguid acknowledge their debt to IRL colleagues for insight and critique that found its way into

this article, and particularly to Susan Stucky and Peter Henschel for their two-by-two "distributed intelligence" chart.

This article was originally published in **Change**, Growing Up Digital, March/April 2000, pp 10-20. It is reprinted with the author's permission and permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. It was published by Heldref Publications, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-1802. Copyright © 2000.

EDUCATION ed AT A DISTANCE
USDLA Journal
A REFEREED JOURNAL OF THE UNITED STATES DISTANCE LEARNING ASSOCIATION
February 2002 ISSN 1537-5080 Vol. 16 : No. 2

E-mail comments to the Editor

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Editor's Note: We are most fortunate to be able to present to USDLA Journal's readership the remarkable and insightful complete first chapter of Dr. Ruch's just published book, Higher Ed, Inc: The Rise of the For-Profit University (John's Hopkins Press). His position espoused here comes from decades of close observation of the mechanics, philosophies and struggles for solvency, successful and not so successful, within academia. Academia is faced with hard economic choices. These choices may not at all be the choices we thought we perceived as we gazed through the slits in our tower wall.

Higher Ed, Inc: The Rise of the For-Profit University

Richard S. Ruch

Chapter 1: Confessions of a For-Profit Dean

I must confess that until a few years ago I thought that all proprietary institutions were the scum of the academic earth. I could not see how the profit motive could properly coexist with an educational mission. While I did not know exactly why I believed this, I was certain in my conviction that non-profit status was noble, just as the profession of education is noble, and that to be for-profit meant to be in it for the money, which was corrupting and ignoble. All the while, I was immune to the irony of the long hours I endured in lunches, dinners, and receptions cultivating potential donors because they had money and my institution needed it. While whole months of my administrative life were spent in meetings about budgets, downsizing, cutting back, and even laying off, I let myself believe that what we were doing was about education and not about money. When my institution created budget forecasts that included provision for excess revenue over expenditures, I did not recognize it as the profit motive. Likewise, I bought into the mythology of the pecking order. I studied and worked in eight different universities that were, for the most part, good ones but not great ones. Except for two semesters at Michigan and one summer at Harvard, I lived in the middle tier of the pecking order. From that vantage point, the proprietary schools were an easy target, serving to locate my institutions in the middle, or perhaps upper middle when compared with the bottom of the barrel.

Having now lived in and studied the view from the other side, I see that I was wrong in my unexamined beliefs about the for-profits, naïve about what it means to be in it for the money, and misinformed about the nature of the profit motive in higher education. With this book I reexamine this sector of American higher education, shattering some of the myths and clarifying the realities of the for-profit sector of the higher-education industry, from its early roots in the evening schools of colonial America to the rapid growth in the 1990s of the large, publicly held, corporate-run universities. What I have learned, and what I hope to substantiate here, is that many of the for-profit providers are actually doing a creditable and even laudable job of addressing educational needs that are in high

demand. That is not to say that these organizations are without faults or that there are not some for-profit educational institutions that are substandard in quality and geared more to making profits than to providing education. Just as there is a wide range of quality among traditional, non-profit colleges and universities, there is a range of quality in the for-profit sector. Just as there has been fraud and abuse of public funds in the non-profit sector, there has been fraud and misuse of financial-aid funds in the for-profits. This book focuses on the largest for-profit institutions, which tend to be located at the upper end of the range in institutional quality. If it is true that the American university system is the envy of the world, part of the credit rightly goes to the unrelenting influence of the for-profit sector, which has stood for the application of education in direct response to social and economic needs and the right to turn a profit on a product or service well delivered and which has continued to force change in a system that has stubbornly resisted it.

The Players

The focus of this book is the reemergence of for-profit higher education in the form of large university systems that are owned and operated by publicly traded for-profit corporations. This is not a book about proprietary schools, the small, family-owned businesses run by one or more proprietors who take the profits earned in the business as personal income. Thousands of these schools exist in America and in other countries to meet the demand for training in several trades and regulated industries, such as cosmetology, automotive mechanics, and tourism. Nor is this a book about the hundreds of diploma mills, fake schools that basically sell degrees in any field to customers who cough up $3,000 to $5,000.[1] Neither is this a book about online universities. Although all of the institutions profiled in this book use online instruction to supplement in-class seat time, online education represents a small portion of their business. Finally, this is not a book about what are called "corporate universities," such as Sun Microsystems University, Motorola University, and the University of Toyota. The subject of this book is for-profit colleges and universities that are regionally accredited, degree-granting institutions of higher education that offer programs at the associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels. (Five of the major companies in this category are profiled in chapter 2.) Instead of donors they have investors. Instead of endowment they have private investment capital. Instead of being tax-exempt they are tax-paying. As the chapters that follow make clear, these core distinctions set these institutions apart, and that has made all the difference.

Some of the more successful for-profit education providers are relatively new organizations, such as Quest Education, founded in 1988 in Roswell, Georgia, an aggressive acquirer of non-profit colleges (with more than 30 campuses by the year 2000), some of which were facing bankruptcy. Others have been around for many years, such as Strayer University, founded in 1892 in Washington, D.C., and the DeVry Institutes of Technology, founded in 1931 in Chicago. Although the for-profit model in higher education is not new, the creation during the 1990s of publicly traded holding companies that own and run universities is the newest development in a tradition of genteel businesses that existed even before the founding of the first American colleges. Indeed, many of the for-profit providers had humble and quiet births, including the boisterous University of Phoenix, which actually grew out of the humanities department at San Francisco State University in the early 1970s.[2] Similarly, some of today's respectable non-profit colleges and universities actually began as proprietary schools, such as Rider University, which was founded in 1865 in Trenton, New Jersey, as one of the campuses of the Bryant and Stratton chain of business schools, some of which survive to this day.

Institutional Growth and Academic Respectability

The newsworthy story in the for-profit sector during the past decade has been growth and increasing respectability. Since 1990 the number of for-profit, degree-granting college and university campuses in the United States has quietly increased by 112 percent, from approximately 350 to 750 campuses.[3] During the same period at least 200 non-profit colleges closed their doors. The National Center for Higher Education Statistics reported that there were 669 for-profit, degree-granting institutions in the United States in 1996. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System indicates that in 1996 about 15 percent of all two- and four-year institutions in the United States were for-profit. It estimated that enrollment in these for-profit colleges and universities was 304,465 in 1996, or 2.1 percent of the total U.S. enrollment of 14,367,530. The number of full-time faculty employed by for-profit, degree-granting institutions in 1996 was estimated to be approximately 26,000, or about 5 percent of the total U.S. full-time faculty of 528,000. For-profit colleges and universities constitute the only sector of the higher-education industry that is growing.* My own prediction, based on a year-long study of the industry, is that the for-profits will continue to grow in number and market share throughout the next decade, whereas growth in the non-profits will continue to decline somewhat.

The increasing respectability of the for-profit institutions and their growing visibility within the higher-education community is evidenced by their meeting and maintaining the standards for accreditation by the regional associations and by other professional accrediting bodies. Argosy Education Group, for example, which offers doctoral programs through the ten-campus system of the American School of Professional Psychology, is regionally accredited by the North Central Association and has also been successful in gaining accreditation at the doctoral level by the American Psychological Association. Similarly, DeVry's campuses hold both regional accreditation and program accreditation in electronics-engineering technology by the Technology Accreditation Commission of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. The University of Phoenix is accredited by the North Central Association, and its nursing program is accredited at the baccalaureate and master's levels by the National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission. The for-profits tend to regard accreditation as a business objective, determining what it will take to meet or exceed the thresholds and then simply allocating the financial and human resources required to meet them. Using this straightforward strategy, they have won the approval of, and often impressed, regional accrediting bodies and their campus-visit teams by meeting and sometimes exceeding the published standards for accreditation. In the past, for-profit institutions struggled to meet the accreditation standards, and even when they did, the accrediting bodies were sometimes reluctant to grant accreditation to these institutions because of their "proprietary" status (see chapter 6). In today's outcomes-assessment environment, to deny accreditation to a for-profit college or university when it meets or exceeds the published standards would probably bring charges of restraint of free trade.

The other aspect of the new respectability of the for-profit providers has to do with the perceived shift in public attitudes toward corporate America and the free-market economy in general. During the final decade of the twentieth century the profit motive seems to have lost some of its association with evil intent. The for-profit universities caught the wave of renewed belief in, and fascination with, corporate enterprise and the performance of the stock market in particular. Even small investors who had no money in the stock market other than perhaps an IRA or part of a 401k or a retirement annuity, such as TIAA-CREF, have done very well during the past ten years. At the same time that the profit motive was enjoying a renaissance of sorts, non-profit organizations were facing greater public scrutiny, in part because of scandals over alleged excessive lobbying, fraud, and mismanagement at such institutions as United Way of America, Toys for Tots,

the NAACP, and Stanford University.

"These are difficult days for America's non-profits," writes Charles Kolb, general counsel for United Way and former official at the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). Kolb sees the Stanford scandal--which broke in 1991, when the university was accused of excessive indirect cost rates and misuse of federal research dollars--as "the beginning episode that brought the `age of accountability' to American postsecondary education in particular and to the non-profit sector more generally."[4] Stanford was ultimately cleared of any criminal charges involving fraud, but the issue of mismanagement had become a major part of the national higher-education agenda. By the mid-1990s non-profit universities were facing what Kolb describes as the third wave of accountability. Higher education was relatively untouched by the first wave, which hit American corporations in the 1980s, as global competitiveness, stockholder demands, and emerging technologies caused massive layoffs and restructuring. The second wave, directed at big government during the Reagan and Bush administrations, targeted government spending and the national deficit. But again, in Kolb's assessment, this second wave of accountability did not significantly impact higher education. The third wave, however, starting with the Stanford case, led to new demands for accountability, the new emphasis on outcomes assessment in the regional accreditation standards, and the language of value added throughout the higher-education industry. At the heart of the accountability issue, says Kolb, is the question of how to measure the value added of a college education. "The sad fact," he laments, "is we don't yet know the answer."[5]

Yet the for-profit colleges and universities do have an answer. For them, the value added of a college education is what Dennis Keller, chairman of DeVry, calls "career launching." The usual metric for assessing value added is the significantly greater earning power of a college graduate compared with that of a non-college graduate (currently about twice as much). The earning-power argument is a difficult pill to swallow for many traditional educators, for it reduces the sacred ideals of higher education, in particular the artes liberales ideal, to an economic-return equation. However, this loss of ideals--or to put it more gently, this narrowing of ideals--is what has happened in American higher education, where today even elite institutions often use the earning power of graduates to justify the price of tuition.[6]

The issue of measuring the payoff of a college degree by the earning power of graduates is addressed more fully in chapter 6. The point here is that the for-profit providers are abler than most non-profits to deliver a direct response to the demand for value-added measurement. Indeed, their corporate environment already requires such measurement as a routine part of business operations.

The Question of Educational Quality

One of the most enduring myths about for-profit educational institutions is that they generally offer a poor-quality education to students. "Many of our colleagues in the traditional academy still believe we are all snake oil sales people," says Jack Sites, CEO and provost of Argosy Education's American Schools of Professional Psychology and a former official with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. He adds: "They continue to hang on to the self-serving myth that we are selling products of sub-par quality for too much money to students who could not get in anywhere else."[7]

In a somewhat kinder judgment, it is often assumed that, at best, what the for-profits provide to students is employability, and not necessarily education.[8] Of course, they do offer employability, and not only is that one of their strengths but it is what a large segment of higher education's consumers expect from a college education. The for-profit providers have aligned themselves with the public's expectation that a good college

education should result in employability. Employability, however, is not all they provide, for real teaching and learning also occur in these institutions. In my experience, when good teachers work with motivated students, real learning often results. All of the for-profit providers profiled in this book have both numerous good teachers and a large proportion of highly motivated students.

Some educators who assume that for-profit schools offer a poor-quality education have asserted that the for-profit providers are subject to less regulation and oversight than are the non-profit institutions.[9] In fact, as publicly held companies, they have oversight and regulatory requirements that go beyond those faced by non-profit institutions, such as quarterly reports to the Securities and Exchange Commission. Others suggest, incorrectly, that for-profit providers are notorious for allegations of fraud and conspiracy. My own review of the literature suggests that there are at least as many actual instances of fraud and mismanagement in the non-profit sector, perhaps more. And Jack Sites observes, "If the journalistic community in America did not hold traditional universities in such high regard, they would find an incredible story in the revelation that higher education is absolutely rife with corruption, fraud, and mismanagement."[10] There is also a lingering belief, deep within the consciousness of the traditional academy, that profits and the market generally are fundamentally antithetical to serving the needs of society and of students.

It is not clear, at least to me, when or how it became a virtue for a university to be organized on a non-profit basis instead of a for-profit one. We know that our earliest universities were strongly and directly tied to the churches in terms of both finances and mission. Perhaps the virtuousness of non-profit status for the university grew out of this early association with churches. Regardless, my own sense is that for-profit or non-profit status is not in and of itself a determinant of institutional quality. A similar point was recently made in a study of the health-care industry, which is undergoing a transformation in teaching hospitals from non-profit to for-profit status.[11] Initially, some medical-school officials found this trend alarming and were concerned that the for-profit companies would cut back and eliminate unprofitable services that were nonetheless important to the hospital's mission. Conducted by two researchers at the Harvard Medical School, the study examined the impact on the teaching mission of hospitals that were sold to for-profit corporations. No negative impacts were found on teaching, medical education, research, or indigent care. In effect, the changeover to for-profit status did not impact the quality of education or the social good one way or the other.

It must also be said that the academy and society in general have for centuries debated the question of what constitutes a proper, quality education. The debate that began in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy about whether the focus of education should be on training the intellect or cultivating noble virtues has not been resolved.[12] No clear, uniform understanding has emerged about what constitutes a proper university education. Instead, there are several different models and philosophies of higher education, just as there is considerable mission diversity among universities. The for-profit institutions are simply part of higher education's philosophical diversity and multiple missions.

The popular assertion that the American system of higher education is the envy of the world, a claim that is routinely heard at the plenary sessions of academic conventions ranging from the Modern Language Association to the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, is sometimes delivered as a kind of reminder that things could be worse. The basis for the claim that the American system is the best in the world is not always apparent, but clearly the United States spends more on education than any other nation--about $750 billion, more than twice as much as on defense, with about $340 billion going to higher education--and American universities continue to attract large numbers of foreign students, especially at the graduate level.

Still, many higher-education insiders continue to sound eschatological alarms, ranging from such thoughtful books as Jaroslav Pelikan's Idea of the University, Bill Readings's

University in Ruins, and Bruce Wilshire's Moral Collapse of the University to books about corruption within the academy and some that point to the "corporatization" of the university as the root problem, such as Nelson and Watt's witty and self-conscious Academic Keywords.[13] These books raise many issues about the present state of higher education in America and its future. None of them and few presenters of plenary speeches at academic conventions are warm to the idea of applying the corporate model to higher education. Some are quick to cite the emergence and growth of such for-profit providers as the University of Phoenix, which is seen as an extreme application of the corporate model where it probably does not belong, as a clear sign of end times. Given the concern about the rapid growth of the for-profit purveyors and the constant claims that higher education is in crisis, collapsing, and headed for ruin, it is not clear just what the rest of the world is envying.

The overlooked and somewhat hidden aspect of the unfolding story of higher education in America is the for-profit sector, which has been present as a mostly silent but nonetheless influential partner in the founding, development, and evolution of the American system of higher education right from the beginning. The rich and deep history of proprietary education in America (see chapter 3) attests to the fact that these institutions developed and matured alongside of, and not apart from, traditional colleges and universities. A true understanding of both the tradition and the future of higher education in this country must account for them.

For-Profit and Non-Profit Distinctions

What is clear is that for-profit and non-profit universities tend to operate under different hierarchies of institutional and organizational values. These different hierarchies of values are revealed in a number of distinctions that can be made between non-profit and for-profit institutions. Table 1.1 shows ten such distinctions that, taken individually, provide a breakdown of salient points of difference and, taken collectively, provide an overall picture of how these types of institutions differ. Each set of distinctions is briefly described below and discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Tax-exempt/Tax-paying

One of the obvious areas of difference is taxation. Milton Friedman, the Nobel laureate economist, has suggested that the terms for-profit and non-profit should be dropped altogether from the higher-education lexicon in favor of the more descriptive tax paying and tax-exempt.[14] Indeed, the essential financing distinction between non-profit and for-profit universities is not a matter of profitability or the profit motive but one of taxation, as both a source of revenue and a form of expenditure (see chapter 4). In essence, non-profit institutions are, by definition, exempt from paying taxes. In fact, non-profit colleges and universities, including all public and most private institutions, receive tax subsidies to support their operations. Public colleges and universities receive an average of 50 percent of their revenues in the form of tax subsidies from federal, state, and local governments, while private non-profit colleges and universities receive about 17 percent.[15] The for-profits, of course, receive no tax subsidies. Instead, they have a substantial tax burden, with most education companies setting aside about 40 percent of earnings before taxes for paying taxes. These differences in the tax status of the institutions represent fundamental differences in the way they are organized as corporate entities. For example, the non-profits are oriented toward maximizing the tax subsidies they receive, whereas the for-profits are oriented toward minimizing the tax they must pay on profits.

Donors / Investors

Non-profit institutions have donors, and the corollary on the for-profit side is investors. Donated income is a key source of operating revenue and financial security for non-profit institutions, and the same is true for the for-profit institutions, for which "donations" come in the form of stock purchases. Non-profits spend considerable energy on the cultivation of potential donors, while for-profits cultivate the investment community. In some respects this cultivation work is similar, particularly because it involves promoting the institution to audiences that have financial resources to donate or invest.

Yet there are differences as well. For one, the cultivation of donors on the non-profit side often involves many members of the institution. Not only the chief development officer and the president but also academic deans, members of the faculty, and even students perform fund-raising work. On the for-profit side, only senior management, supported by one or two professional staff members, cultivates investors. As an academic dean at DeVry, I have never been involved in fund-raising of any kind, but as an academic dean in non-profit universities I spent as much as a third of my time on fund-raising. A second difference is that while both donors and investors have an interest in how their financial support is used, investors also expect a financial return. Investors bring an added dimension of accountability for operating the institution in ways that ensure profitability and future earnings.

Endowment/Private Investment Capital

The third distinction follows from the second. Donated income is accumulated in the form of endowment in the non-profits, while stock purchases in the for-profits take the form of private investment capital. Endowment and private investment capital function similarly in each sector, providing the financial foundation for long-term solvency and investment income that can also be used to support current operations. Non-profit universities, like other individual and corporate investors, invest all or part of their endowment funds in the stock and bond markets. When these investments earn dividends, the non-profit sector returns a portion to the endowment. When the for-profits earn dividends on their private investment capital, they return a portion to the stockholder. Both endowment and private investment capital, then, are invested for the purpose of realizing growth, and a portion of that growth is returned to either the donated fund or the investor.

Attracting money, whether in the form of donors or investors, requires the ability to inspire confidence. When a traditional university is able to build a substantial endowment fund, it not only ensures the institution's future but also economically affirms the institution's reason for being. When alumni, corporations, private foundations, state governments, and wealthy individuals donate money to a university, the institution is affirmed in powerful and tangible ways. In essence donors are saying, "We believe in you." The same is true in the for-profit sector when investors "donate" their money to an educational company through the purchase of its stock. When private citizens and corporate investors buy ownership in a university through stock purchases, the institution's financial future is secured and its reason for being is affirmed. Both the for-profits and the non-profits depend on other people's money for their solvency and long-term survival. The for-profit model is stockholder-driven, while the non-profit model is stakeholder-driven.

Stakeholders/Stockholders

The stockholder-driven model appears on the surface to be vastly simpler than the stakeholder-driven model. Stockholders all want the same thing, namely, a return on their investment. To ensure a steady influx of private investment capital, the for-profits must demonstrate an ability to generate a return to stockholders in the form of equity. The simple barometer of how well a publicly traded company performs is, of course, the changing value of its stock. When the stock price goes up, investors make money, and when the stock price goes down, they lose money. The actual gain or loss does not occur, of course, unless the stock is actually sold off. However, the factors that can influence changes in the value of stock are often complex and are influenced by variables outside the control of the company, such as global economic trends and demographic shifts. Of necessity, this adds a certain amount of unpredictability to the company's performance, which in turn adds risk to stockholders. Even when the financial indicators look good, investors will sometimes bail out. Investors buy stock when they feel confident, and consumer confidence is a complex equation.

One of the interesting features of the stockholder-driven model in higher education is employee ownership. Faculty members, for example, along with the deans, presidents, and even the registrars and admissions representatives, often own stock in for-profit universities. This stock may be accumulated through an employee stock-purchase program or a 401k retirement program, or it may be awarded in the form of stock options. DeVry recently gave all full-time employees stock-option awards based on years of service. Aside from being a nice gesture, it was an astute business decision. When faculty members, for example, also become investors in their university through stock ownership, they soon develop a personal stake not only in academic matters but also in the financial success of the enterprise. When the company that owns the university is profitable, everyone who owns stock shares in the profits.

In contrast, stakeholders--students and their families, faculty members, administrators, trustees, alumni, donors, employers, accreditation bodies, community leaders, government agencies--have varied and sometimes incompatible interests and concerns. Trustees, for example, may argue for a reduction in faculty release time from teaching, while certain program-accrediting bodies encourage more release time for research and scholarly activity. Many college and university presidents, along with many other administrators, spend much of their time responding to these stakeholders. Although for-profit institutions must deal with many of these same stakeholders as well, their first priority is to the stockholders. Built into the stakeholder-driven model, of course, is the idea that many persons should have their say, which requires an enormous amount of time and patience and often stagnates the decision-making process. This emphasis on participation and inclusion of everyone who has a stake in the institution brings up the fifth distinction: shared governance versus traditional management.

Shared Governance/Traditional Management

The concept of shared governance is deeply ingrained in the culture of the non-profit university. In the British, French, and German universities, for example, the faculty senates are said to wield considerably more power than the rectors.[16] By comparison, American university presidents and provosts appear to have more formal power, although they often feel powerless. "Shared governance is an enlightened concept," says Scott S. Cowen, president of Tulane University, "but in execution it may actually be a deterrent to the future of higher education."[17] Cowen is outspoken about the "new competitive scenario unlike anything we've seen before" in traditional higher education, resulting in part from the rise and success of the new for-profit providers. Consequently, he wants his

institution and others to be able to make at least some major decisions quickly and effectively. Standing in the way of quick, effective decision making is the tradition of shared governance. "The real zealots of shared governance lecture that shared governance is an end in itself," he says. "It is not."[18]

Yet shared governance is deeply woven into the fabric of the university, even on the for-profit side, although these corporations have an advantage: the for-profits can and do reappropriate the concept of shared governance, applying it to certain areas and excluding it from others. In my experience, the management strategy of the for-profits is to allow enough shared governance to appease regional accreditation visiting teams and keep the faculty from unionizing. In so doing, the for-profits retain management control of the decision-making process while still making some provision for shared governance. For example, faculty in the for-profits do not have tenure, which changes the balance of power between the faculty member (employee) and the institution (employer). Yet the faculty in the for-profits do enjoy a reasonable measure of academic freedom, and they participate fully in decisions regarding the curriculum. In other areas, however, such as admission requirements, the for-profit faculty do not have much of a voice. (The issues of tenure, academic freedom, and organizational culture in the for-profit institutions are addressed in chapter 5.)

The governance structures and processes of the for-profit university are based on the values of traditional corporate management. Accountability for certain outcomes is fixed with individual managers, who have both the responsibility and the authority to make decisions. In these environments, governance is not "shared" in the way the traditional academy has operationalized the term. The reason for this can be summarized in one word--bosses.

One of the realities of working in for-profit universities is the presence of bosses, and this is especially true of the multicampus organizations controlled by a home office. Everyone on these campuses has at least one boss, often two or three, and there is no mistaking who they are: they conduct and sign your annual performance appraisal, which directly affects your compensation and promotability. In contrast, the collegial model of traditional universities intentionally blurs the distinction between bosses and colleagues. The dean wants to be your colleague, as does the provost and even the president, and while they are also bosses in the technical sense, they are encouraged to embrace this role apologetically. In the for-profits your boss is clearly not your colleague but your superior, and you are his or her employee, subordinate in rank, authority, responsibility, and power. Any modicum of shared governance is inevitably split unequally, and the boss must sanction any pretense of genuine collegiality. In many American corporations today there are some enlightened and progressive leaders and managers, but the for-profit higher-education companies are all managed conservatively according to tried-and-true methods of supervision. (The management culture of the for-profits, with its emphasis on the supervision of work, along with an explanation for why this conservative approach has so far worked fairly successfully, is discussed more fully in chapter 5.)

Prestige Motive/Profit Motive

A sixth distinction describes an underlying motive that drives the institution toward the achievement of its goals and mission. The non-profits are driven by what I call the prestige motive, as opposed to the profit motive on the for-profit side. The prestige motive is the desire to move up in the pecking order of perceived ranking among competing institutions. All colleges and universities have a group of other institutions to which they like to compare themselves, whether it's the Ivy League, the second tier, the best buys, or a group of neighboring competitors. Despite questions about the methodologies used in the college rankings published in such popular magazines as Money and U.S. News & World

Reports, these rankings are taken seriously by most institutions listed in them, and those excluded want to get on the lists. As some institutions grow and mature, they often seem to fall into a kind of Harvard-in-the-small mentality, seeking to add more signs of prestige, such as endowed chairs, and even changing their institutional names to reflect greater respectability. Many state colleges have fought to be called universities, and some have also dropped the word state from their names, such as Memphis State University, which used to be called Memphis State College and is now called the University of Memphis. The drive for greater prestige sometimes compels institutions to take actions that anger alumni and alienate the local community, such as Trenton State College's decision to change its name to the College of New Jersey, a decision that still irks the city fathers in Trenton as well as the old guard at Princeton University (which was originally founded as the College of New Jersey).

The for-profits, on the other hand, are not particularly interested in prestige; they are driven by the profit motive. (I argue in chapter 4 that the profit motive is actually alive in non-profit colleges and universities, albeit not with the same visibility and force as in the for-profits.) Profitability is imperative in an enterprise structured on the stockholder model, and at the for-profit universities the profit motive translates into a kind of bottom-line discipline that impacts the whole organization. In such an environment, the academic side of the house becomes a tightly managed service operation, for the for-profit providers regard the classroom as the place where revenue is generated and costs are the highest.

In the simplest of terms, the for-profit universities have taken a highly traditional model of education--a teacher in front of a class of students--and run it like a business. Scale economies and operating efficiencies are deployed to the fullest extent, with the result that the familiar inefficiencies of the traditional college in such areas as space utilization, class size, and efficient deployment of faculty, are minimized. (The "luxury of inefficiency" in traditional higher education is discussed in chapter 6.)

The faculty, which in all educational institutions represents the single largest recurring financial expenditure, are fully deployed to teach in the for-profit institutions. At traditional universities, faculty are typically released from a third to a half of their teaching time for other responsibilities, primarily research, administration or governance, and service activities. Such release time may be a necessary investment in a research university, but in the applications-oriented for-profit environment it is considered a nonproductive expense that cannot be leveraged into profitability. The heavier teaching loads (usually four to five classes a week) and almost total lack of release time for research and minimal release time for governance represent significant cost savings in the for-profit institutions. Yet it is not merely efficiencies and scale economies that result in profitability. My years in the for-profit educational sector have taught me that the two factors above all others that drive profitability are educational quality and customer service. No for-profit college or university can survive without providing both a reasonably high-quality educational experience and a high level of customer service. If someone imagines that these institutions make profits merely because they offer a substandard education on a massive scale, they are largely mistaken. Student consumers, especially the more mature students typical of the for-profit providers, are knowledgeable and demanding customers who are not easily satisfied. They demand a substantive and rigorous educational experience for their tuition dollars, along with a high level of convenience and customer service. And if they do not find it, they will go elsewhere.

Why and how the for-profits are profitable while many traditional non-profit institutions struggle to break even is discussed in detail in chapter 4, where the downsides of the profit motive--greed and the emphasis on sales--are also considered. The point here is that the for-profits replace the prestige motive with the profit motive.

Cultivation of Knowledge/Application of Learning

In fundamental ways the major universities are now focused on the generation of knowledge and the advancement of the disciplines through basic and applied research, experimentation, and discovery. The value of such work permeates the whole of such institutions, and some would say it is at the very heart of the idea of the university. Liberal arts colleges represent another valued tradition related to the cultivation of knowledge, in this case for more intrinsic and less extrinsic ends, through the training of the intellect and the development of moral habits and virtues.[19] The generation, dissemination, and advancement of knowledge are core values that are protected by academic freedom and more or less woven into the mission statement of virtually every respectable, traditional academic institution. Even the for-profit providers do not totally ignore these values, for they are more or less built into accreditation and state licensing standards. While DeVry, for example, offers no degrees in the liberal arts, 50 percent of the coursework in the baccalaureate programs at the New Jersey campus is in the liberal arts and sciences, as required by the state of New Jersey. All of higher education is deeply influenced by the values associated with what I call here the cultivation of knowledge. Indeed, a recent study of faculty-incentive systems published by the National Center for Postsecondary Education Improvement concluded that "the research model has come to pervade all types of institutions of higher education."[20]

Yet there is another view of what it means to be in the knowledge business. This view acknowledges the value of generating new knowledge but also recognizes another important priority, the application of knowledge that already exists to solve practical problems. As I illustrate in chapter 3, this focus on the application of knowledge, along with the development of skills, to solve problems has been the primary focus of the for-profit sector of higher education since its beginnings in colonial America. This focus requires being closely attuned to the current needs of the marketplace, especially in areas where there is a strong, unmet demand for specialized education and training.

Discipline-driven/Market-driven

Market responsiveness is the key to the success of the for-profit players. The phenomenal growth of the University of Phoenix during the last ten years, for example, is essentially the result of timing and successful market positioning. Phoenix jumped out ahead of all competitors by being at the right place at the right time with the right products and services. As the adult population grew to represent 50 percent of all college students, Phoenix was there with what many of them were looking for, described by Jorge de Alva, Phoenix's president, as the demand for "a professional, businesslike relationship with their campus that is characterized by convenience, cost- and time-effective services and education, predictable and consistent quality, seriousness of purpose, and high customer service geared to their needs, not those of faculty members, administrators, or staff." 21 Such a description holds true for DeVry, Strayer, Education Management, and Argosy, each of which has identified a unique market niche within the vast marketplace of U.S. higher education's 15 million students.

Market responsiveness requires that an institution adapt to rapid, discontinuous change. Curricula must be updated quickly and continuously, new programs must be developed and launched while the market need is extant, and existing courses and programs that no longer meet current demand must be dropped. Many traditional, non-profit colleges and universities are unresponsive or slow to respond in these ways because they are discipline-driven, not market-driven. While the for-profits listen to the marketplace, the

non-profits listen mainly to the disciplines.

Academic disciplines are controlled by the faculty and tend to change slowly, deliberately, and incrementally. The traditional model places a high value on allowing the disciplines and their professors to play the lead role in guiding change in academic programs; as a result, the change process in many of these institutions is evolutionary. Tenured faculty must be deployed even if there is low demand for their disciplines. In addition to the traditional emphasis on inclusiveness, collaboration, and consensus, the discipline-driven institution is less concerned with the marketplace and less able to respond to it quickly.

Quality of Outcomes/Quality of Inputs

In allocating resources and assessing educational quality the for-profits tend to place greater emphasis on educational outputs--student satisfaction, retention rates, completion rates, and placement rates--while the non-profits have traditionally placed a higher value on inputs--admissions selectivity, faculty credentials, and an array of extracurricular programs and activities. Student placement, for example, is carefully measured in the for-profit environment, where it is generally supported by a relatively large investment in human, physical, and financial resources. At my own DeVry campus, for example, with an enrollment of 3,500 students, the placement office is staffed by 13 full-time employees, 10 of whom are professional placement advisers. This represents a much larger placement operation than found at most non-profit institutions. As a consequence, the placement rate at DeVry has hovered around 95 percent for more than 10 years running, a rate considerably higher than at most traditional undergraduate colleges and universities. Clearly, student placement is a high core value at DeVry, and a key outcomes metric in assessing institutional quality.

In contrast, a number of traditional non-profit institutions do not measure and report student-placement rates. Instead, they tend to place a higher value on such input measures as student selectivity and entering SAT and ACT scores, which are carefully measured and reported as an indication of institutional quality and ranking in the pecking order.

Faculty Power/Customer Power

The 10th and final distinction concerns the locus of power within the institution. In most, perhaps all, of the non-profits the faculty are the focus of power within the governance structure. Longstanding tradition, the dominance of the disciplines, the tenure system, the principle of academic freedom, shared governance, and the presence of collective bargaining on many campuses have all contributed to strengthening and protecting the power of the faculty. In the for-profit environment the role of the faculty is more limited, and they generally do not have as much institutional power. The strong customer orientation on the campuses of Phoenix, DeVry, Education Management, Argosy, and Strayer shifts the center of gravity. At these institutions, the students and the managers (or bosses) are the focus of power. (This shift and its implications on the life of the institution is analyzed further in chapter 5.)

Crossing Over to the For-Profit Side

Those of us who have left traditional universities and crossed over to for-profit institutions

feel a certain kinship. What many of us have discovered is that the for-profit way of doing education is not so much better or worse than the non-profit way; it is just a different approach. Many who have crossed over find that there is a certain refreshing honesty associated with being openly for-profit, a welcoming lack of pretense in the economic exchange between students and their institutions. Administrators who have worked in both camps (and even some of the faculty) find that not having to deal with the tenure system is a relief.

There have been many times when I truly enjoyed the administrative freedom of actually making decisions and implementing them. It has been satisfying, for example, to see a new degree program for which there is strong market demand go from idea to implementation within twelve months. I have felt effective and responsible to my students in being able to handle a few cases involving faculty members who were, simply put, terrible classroom teachers. One, for example, was a professor who was abusing his female students through inappropriate language, extreme suggestiveness, and outright propositioning. I witnessed this behavior firsthand, as did others on the faculty. It was gratifying for me to be able to get this person out of the classroom immediately. That would have never happened in a traditional academic environment, where the concern for due process would have prevented me from taking immediate action.

And yet, I must confess that for traditional academic types like me there is also a certain sense of loss in moving into the for-profit environment. I was weaned on the ideals of collegiality and shared governance, and I regard these ideals as noble, enlightened, and worth striving for. At DeVry, in my work with the academic deans and the faculty I often have found myself pulled between my natural instincts for collegial decision-making and my company's impatience with the inefficiency that results from inclusiveness and debate. In addition, on some occasions during my years at DeVry I have felt that the faculty were not treated with the kind of respect and professionalism they deserved. For example, my campus often plans faculty colloquia during semester breaks on topics generated by the faculty themselves. Even though 90 percent of the faculty participate in these events, the upper managers have urged me to take attendance, make of list of those who do not attend, and perhaps even dock their paychecks accordingly. I resist this practice because I think it is insulting to the faculty, but I feel an acute sense of loss in the fact that my bosses asked me to do it. I want us instead to honor the principle of attraction, making these colloquia so stimulating and relevant that nearly 100 percent of the faculty will make it a point to be there. If only 90 percent show up (which still seems quite remarkable to me), it simply means we need to do a better job of making these events more attractive.

In my twenty years as an administrator in a private, urban university, a state land-grant university, a liberal arts college, and now a for-profit provider, I have worked during periods of growth and expansion and periods of decline and cutting back. Growth is definitely more satisfying. Building new campuses, hiring new faculty, and generally having plenty of cash to spend on technology, faculty travel, and new program development all make for a stimulating experience. If, like me, you like the idea of working in an institution that is somewhat of a renegade, needing to prove its worthiness to the skeptics but also possessing the financial resources to do so, then the for-profit environment can be an exciting place to be.

Still, there is this sense of loss, call it sadness, a gentle melancholy known in Buddhism as "the death of dreams." In an engaging article in the New Yorker entitled "Drive-Thru U," James Traub writes that "the traditional American university occupies a space that is both bounded and pastoral--a space that speaks of monastic origins and a commitment to unworldliness. "22 For-profits are by design decidedly worldly. Traub puts it this way: "The institution that sees itself as the steward of intellectual culture is becoming increasingly marginal; the others are racing to accommodate the new student."

Those time-honored, laudable ideals--shared governance, the life of the mind, learning for its own sake--sometimes haunt me in my dreams like a secret lover. Something ancient in

my heart of hearts resists the notion that efficiency and practicality should define the greatest good. There are real losses in this shift in values, and I suspect that all of us in academia, regardless of our institutional affiliation, have felt them to some degree.

Perhaps that is why I so enjoyed being a member of the mural committee, a group of ten students and faculty who designed and painted a mural over the course of two semesters on a 50-foot wall in the student commons area of my DeVry campus. The painting of the mural was a case study in how individual artistic expression and shared, community vision can work in harmony. We worked collaboratively on our 50-foot wall, sometimes dealing with disagreement but managing somehow to respect one another's individual artistic sensibilities while also adapting our personal styles to create one whole work. There were days when I felt that this was the most important and fulfilling work I did.

EndNotes

Chapter 1 Confessions of a For-Profit Dean

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14. Milton Freeman's statements about tax-paying versus tax-avoiding appear in L. Spencer, "The Perils of Socialized Higher Education," *Forbes*, 27 May 1991, 294.
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EDUCATION ed AT A DISTANCE

USDLA Journal

A REFEREED JOURNAL OF THE UNITED STATES DISTANCE LEARNING ASSOCIATION

February 2002 | ISSN 1537-5080 | Vol. 16 : No. 2

E-mail comments to the Editor

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Editor's Note: This research paper was presented live at the **Teachers Develop Teachers' Research - TDTR5 - Conference,** Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, September 9, 2001. It addresses the crucial problems of course design, levels of feedback, and teacher satisfaction. The results have significant implications for teacher selection, training, and support.

Making Teachers Feel Contented with Online Courses

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Our aim was to examine levels of satisfaction of English teachers (currently taking online courses or having taken such courses in the past), and determine the factors influencing them.

Very often, online course designers do not get sufficient feedback on levels of satisfaction of their courses' participants – feedback that might otherwise bring forth some improvement in the course design and delivery approaches, as well as in proper placement testing procedures.

We were especially interested in observing some connection between confidence levels of participants (i.e., to what extent they felt computer-fluent) and their satisfaction levels, in order to find out whether this connection indeed exists, and if so, what sort of relation it is – positive or negative.

Professional experience is a variable which might influence satisfaction levels: the longer this teacher has been in the field, the more experience he/she might have accumulated to make learning easier and more enjoyable.

On the other hand, those who have been working for only a few years may have retained their learning skills; their learnability may be higher, hence their satisfaction level may be expected to be greater as well.

Such factors as age, country of birth, being a native vs. non-native speaker of English, cultural background, educational status, etc. may play a certain role in determining satisfaction levels and have to be taken into consideration when predicting satisfaction levels.

However, we found the main factors influencing satisfaction levels to be the delivery mode and the collaboration aspect. It also appears that communication with instructors and peers plays a decisive role in determining satisfaction levels of participants.

It all began last winter when my online students started complaining, which happened just a few weeks after the course had begun. Normally, one expects a few unhappy students in every group, but in this case, the students were themselves teachers, some of them with lots of experience. Just look at their complaints:

Hi Lev.

When I was accepted into the course, I was told that my computer skills were sufficient, and that I'd learn along the way. I feel like a very weak pupil who doesn't understand many of the things posted;

the language isn't familiar to me, and I'm not sure how to proceed. I now know how students feel when something isn't clear. Very frustrating and demoralizing.

Patricia

Dear Lev,

We have had severe computer problems. My computer has been infected with a virus that was extremely difficult to get rid of, and Debby's computer crashed. Rodika has been ill, and Orit seems to have disappeared! Quite frankly, something to which I was really looking forward turned into a nightmare, with due dates coming nearer and nearer, and more things to do pouring in, with no way of doing anything about it!

Avlynne

Dear Lev,

Help!!! Why did you make me a group leader????!!!!! This is a grave mistake. I am at minus-basic level. Please reply.

Donna

Dear Lev,

I am writing to you because I have a problem with the group. Since we received our assignment on Tuesday, I have written 3 e-mails off to Victoria and Nataly. I have received no reply, letter, or any word from them. I am unable to take responsibility for others who don't want to be involved.

Jenny

Hi, Lev!

I cannot understand why this has developed into such an issue! I see now that being in one group with Jenny after this will be pretty unpleasant. I don't think she should have run to you complaining before she even knows how I usually work and what has happened.

Victoria

Something was definitely going wrong in the logistics department. We decided to research the topic. The initial idea was to collect the data from the existing pool of students by e-mail questionnaire; but as we realized that the problem was fairly universal, we came to a conclusion that it would be better to extend our survey, making it available to a wider audience.

A survey questionnaire was created and posted on the Web as an interactive (clickable) form. The survey consisted of three parts:

Part One: Description of the course

- How was the communication with the instructor conducted?
- When were you informed about the course requirements?
- What was the nature of peer collaboration in group assignments?
- When working on group assignment, what was your role in decision-making?
- What level of computer proficiency did the course require?
- What was the level of your computer proficiency at the beginning of the course?
- Was there an improvement in the level of your computer proficiency when you finished the course?

- Was the course material studied easy or hard?
- What was the most important aspect learned during the course?
- If an improvement in your computer proficiency occurred, what caused it?
- When you submitted an assignment for assessment, did you get a feedback on time?
- When you would send a question to your instructor, did you get an answer on time?
- Was the grading system clear and objective?
- To what extent was the assessment of your assignments fair?

Part Two: Satisfaction with the course

In general, how can you define your level of satisfaction with the course taken?

Based on your experience, will you take any online courses in the future?

What questions will you ask before making a decision to take an online course in the future?

Part Three: What was the influence of these factors on your satisfaction with the course?

- Your insufficient computer proficiency level at the beginning of the course
- The improvement in your computer proficiency caused by the course
- Your previous experience with online courses
- New skills learned, or old skills improved
- The content of the courses
- Timeliness of instructor’s answers to your questions and feedback on your assignments
- Fairness of assessment
- The emotional aspect of communication with the instructor
- Effectiveness of individual tutoring over e-mail
- The necessity to participate in group assignments
- Your role in groupwork decision-making
- Workload distribution

The Results

We had a fairly short period of time to collect the data; fortunately, the mailing lists where we posted the request to fill in the questionnaire, and the Web as a medium turned out to be very efficient. The results thus obtained are presented below.

There were 70 respondents; those who identified their origin were from 8 countries:

USA 26	Canada 1
Israel 26	Italy 1
UK 4	Germany 1
Australia 2	Japan 1

Satisfaction levels were distributed the following way:

low 8%

low to medium 2%

medium 14%

medium to high 48%

high 28%

The following methods were used to communicate with the instructor:

e-mail 84%

message board 60%

chat 35%

web form 18%

Participants were informed about prerequisites

well before registering for the course - 73%

only after registering for the course – 27%

The course material studied was perceived by the participants as

very easy - 3%

easy 9%

moderately hard 55%

hard 28%

very hard 5%

The participants' questions were answered on time:

always 42%

usually 42%

sometimes 13%

seldom 3%

never 0%

Assignments were graded on time:

always 32%

usually 38%

seldom 24%

never 6%

Were the answers helpful and comprehensive?

The answers were:

very helpful and comprehensive 33%

helpful and comprehensive 41%

moderately helpful and comprehensive 22%

not very helpful and comprehensive 5%

not helpful and comprehensive at all 0%

The answers were encouraging:

Always 39%

Usually 41%

Sometimes 14%

Seldom 6%

Never 0%

Was the grading system clear and objective?

Yes – 89%

No – 11%

To what extent was the assessment of your assignments fair?

always 52%

in most cases 42 %

in part of the cases 6 %

almost never 0 %

never 0 %

The most important aspect learned during the course was:

new skills 45%

new methodology 28%

new content 14%

other 13%

The main cause of improvement in computer-related skills was:

self-study required 47%

course materials 34%

instructor's explanations 26%

peer collaboration 18%

other 6%

Factors that Influence Satisfaction with the Course

What was the influence of the following factors on your satisfaction with the course?

The necessity to participate in group assignments

no influence   32%

very little influence 16%

some influence 25%

considerable influence 22%

powerful influence 5%

Nothing conclusive!

Your role in groupwork decision-making

no influence   37%

very little influence 16%

some influence 23%

considerable influence 23%

powerful influence 2%

Nothing conclusive!

Workload distribution

no influence   29%

very little influence 14%

some influence 32%

considerable influence 22%

powerful influence 3%

Nothing conclusive!

Insufficient computer proficiency level at the beginning of the course

does not apply 74%

no influence   5%

very little influence 6%

some influence 11%

considerable influence 6%

powerful influence 0%

Insignificant!

The improvement in computer proficiency caused by the course

does not apply 30%

no influence 5%

very little influence 5%

some influence 36%

considerable influence 20%

powerful influence 5%

Insignificant!

Previous experience with online courses

does not apply 54%

no influence 4%

very little influence 7%

some influence 15%

considerable influence 13%

powerful influence 6%

Insignificant!

New skills learned, or old skills improved

does not apply 9%

no influence 2%

very little influence 3%

some influence 40%

considerable influence 31%

powerful influence 15%

Important!

The content of the course

does not apply 5%

no influence 2%

very little influence 2%

some influence 30%

considerable influence 45%

powerful influence 17%

Important!

Timeliness of instructor's answers to questions and feedback on assignments

no influence 8%

very little influence 13%

some influence 30%

considerable influence 31%

powerful influence 19%

Important!

Fairness of assessment

no influence 11%

very little influence 9%

some influence 41%

considerable influence 33%

powerful influence 6%

Important!

The emotional aspect of communication with the instructor

no influence 6%

very little influence 13%

some influence 25%

considerable influence 30%

powerful influence 25%

Important!

Efficiency of individual tutoring over e-mail

no influence 16%

very little influence 11%

some influence 42%

considerable influence 24%

powerful influence 6%

Important!

Plans to take DL courses in the future:

•certainly not 0%

•maybe 31%

•definitely yes 69%

Preliminary Conclusions

1. The majority of the respondents who indicated that their initial computer skills were higher (intermediate+ or advanced) than required for the course they took (intermediate), and that – quite naturally – there was no improvement in their computer proficiency, belonged to low satisfaction levels group. On the contrary, most of the respondents reporting consistent initial skills deficiency (mostly moderate – one step below the required) or adequacy of skills noted that their computer-related skills improved towards the end of the course. Not surprisingly, they belonged to medium-to-high and high satisfaction level groups.

Thus we hypothesize that a moderate gap between the initial skill level and the requirements can be viewed as a positive motivational challenge; at the same time, overqualification (having much higher computer skills than required for the course) can serve as a negative outcome predictor.

When planning placement testing, one should include some elements that would expose overqualification. Such applicants should be screened and filtered: they are a potential low satisfaction risk group!

2. It turned out that 27% of the respondents (~1/4) learned what the prerequisites were only after actually having started the course. However, this 1:3 "informed/uninformed" ratio was relatively constant throughout all the satisfaction level groups.

3. Timeliness of instructor response and assignment grading

For all respondents:

No or very little influence - 20%

Some influence, considerable influence or powerful influence – 80%

For respondents with medium-to-high and high satisfaction levels:

¾ got their papers graded on time;

8/9 received prompt response from the instructor.

4. The character of the answers:

Helpful and comprehensive: Reported by 4/5 of high- and medium-to-high- satisfaction respondents

Encouraging: Reported by 9/10 of high- and medium-to-high- satisfaction respondents

5. Peer collaboration:

Fair distribution of team workload was consistently reported by 7/8 of high- and medium-to-high-satisfaction respondents; 1/8 indicated that some worked more than the others – these respondents probably were those who worked less, so they were still quite happy with the courses…

In low-satisfaction group, only about half of the respondents reported fair workload distribution; it looks like for this group, fairness of workload distribution was not among the decisive satisfaction factors.

In all satisfaction level groups, most of the respondents noted their opinion was taken into consideration, so it looks that, although generally being quite important, this factor does not define satisfaction level directly.

While in lower satisfaction groups only about 60% of the respondents noted that the grading system was sufficiently clear and objective, in higher satisfaction groups practically all respondents reported it; this factor appears to be consistently connected with higher satisfaction levels.

6. Proficiency improvement

As we earlier said, proficiency improvement does not directly correlate with satisfaction levels. However, while in low-satisfaction groups this claim remains valid, in higher-satisfaction groups the proficiency increase figures are much higher.

The question whether a respondent was actively using the new skills and knowledge was included as a hidden verification tool against the emotional self-assessment: persons who are **really** dissatisfied with a course will not use the stuff learnt in it for their teaching. This turns out to be a correct assumption: only about half of the low-satisfaction group reported using what they had learned, while in the higher-satisfaction group, the figure rises to 4/5.

7. As you remember, we asked whether the respondent was planning to take similar courses in the future.

For the whole population, 31% answered “maybe”, and 69 gave an outright “yes”.

When analyzed separately for different satisfaction level groups, this looks different:

In low-satisfaction groups, only 40% said “yes”, with 60% “maybe”;

In higher-satisfaction groups, however, “yes” doubled to 78%. Nothing surprising in this, of course, but it’s nice to know.

A colleague who has both taken and authored quite a few online courses has noted recently: “Online courses are addictive – both to take, and to develop and teach. “

Feedback

The online form we used also contained a fill-in field: what questions will you ask before entering another online course?

The answers to this included lots of questions showing that people just do not read course prerequisites. However, some of the questions were quite relevant and up to the point. We collected and grouped them:

PROCEDURES:

What types of online interaction will be used?

Is communication by message board or email?

Will the timetable be adhered to?

How many assignments will be required and what is the schedule for submission?

How many articles do we have to read?

How many hours of work is expected? (The course I took was for 56 hours and the work was at least double)

Can I spread the workload as suits me?

GROUP WORK:

Will there be group work? Is group work compulsory?

How much groupwork is required, and how will it be evaluated?

Will I be put in a group without being asked first or will I be able to choose my partners?

How will the instructor assign groups and group work - will I have a say so in whom I want to work with?

How will roles be allocated and equity in workload determined?

What is the background of the other participants (computer and teaching experience)?

INSTRUCTOR:

Is the instructor more a teacher or a technologist?

How soon should I expect feedback from the instructor?

Does the instructor know more than I do? (I was almost at the same level as the instructor in the course I took).

To what extent is the instructor willing to answer questions, explain and encourage?

How does the instructor see his role and what is his general attitude to queries? Will he be flexible?

Availability of instructor, methods of feedback.

What is the instructor's experience of online learning and teaching?

Standards and expectations of instructors; whether the presence of non-native English speakers will influence those standards and expectations.

ACCREDITATION:

Has the course been trial-run online before?

Is the course accredited?

What advantages will having such a qualification provide?

What bodies will recognize courses completed through this organization?

What are the professional credentials of the online program providers, instructors, and administrators?

Some Broader Conclusions

To minimize uncertainty, which later results in dissatisfaction, course descriptions should include:

Detailed prerequisites – skills, software and hardware; see example:

Prerequisites

In order to keep up with the course, you should possess the following skills:

Knowledge of Windows - how to ...

- switch from one application to another
- create/delete/rename files and folders
- move files from one folder to another

MS Word text-processing skills:

- create well-formatted handouts and worksheets to go with web-based activities

E-mail

- download (receive) messages
- compose and send messages
- reply/forward mail
- send and open attachments
- organize your messages into folders

Course structure, schedule, procedures, workload, group work, communication protocols, etc.;

Week #	Module studied this week:	Assignments	
		Message board / Chat	Practical Assignments
0			Prepare your hardware and software, activate your e-mail account if necessary. Send an e-mail to your instructor in order to establish working connection. Register at the mailing list.
1	Games	Familiarize yourself with the message board and chatroom environment.	
2		F2F / Chat #1	
3	Vocabulary / Grammar	Present yourself and tell your short bio. Make a special accent on your teaching experience and current situation	
4			Write and hand in Assignment #1

Assessment criteria:

Components	Incomplete / Unacceptable	Good	Excellent
Content			

1. Consistency of structure	0 to 5 points Lesson plan is not consistent	6 to 10 points Lesson plan is adequately structured.	11 to 15 points Lesson plan is structured clearly and explicitly; it grabs attention.
2. Target audience	0 to 5 points No class outline is presented	6 to 10 points Main features of the class have been identified. Insufficient description of specific learning styles or preferences.	11 to 1 5 points Class outline fully describes the target population. All the necessary information regarding the class is present.
3. Lesson objectives	0 to 5 points Little or no connection can be traced between the declared lesson objectives and the plan presented.	6 to 10 points Connection between the declared lesson objectives and the plan presented is sufficiently clear.	11 to 1 5 points Connection between the declared lesson objectives and the plan presented is clear and explicit.
4. Incorporation of Internet resources	0 to 6 points No resources are listed.	7 to 13 points Some listing of Internet resources is provided.	14 to 20 points A variety of Internet resources are included. Each resource can be unambiguously identified.
Presentation Form			
5. Clarity of writing and information display	0 to 5 points It is hard to understand what the writer is trying to say. Misspelled words, incorrect grammar, and improper punctuation are evident and distracting.	6 to 10 points Writing is generally clear, but unnecessary words are used. Meaning is sometimes unclear. A few words are either misused or misspelled. A few grammar and punctuation errors have been found. The document could profit from better organization.	11 to 1 5 points Writing is crisp, clear, and succinct. The writer incorporates the active voice when appropriate. No misspelling, grammar, or punctuation mistakes are evident.

Extensive information concerning the faculty (course authors, instructors and administrators);

· Course accreditation;

· What graduates say about the course;

· A link to a sample unit/module/lesson.

Ways to Achieve Higher Satisfaction Levels

To ensure higher satisfaction levels, special attention should be paid to the following aspects of the course:

Communication media: e-mail is by far the most popular means of communication; learners seem to feel most comfortable with it. In addition, e-mail is “push technology”, as opposed to “pull technology” like message boards. If you want ALL your messages delivered and received on time, PUSH!

About ¼ of online learners manage not to have found out what the prerequisites are until after they have started the course. It makes sense to create a kind of a “license agreement” listing all the major points a learner has to know, and develop a mechanism that involves some sort of confirmation sent by every learner before actually starting studying.

LICENSE AGREEMENT

Dear Learner,

this educational service is provided to enable you to improve your teaching ability. We are doing our best to help you become a modern teacher. Please read the license agreement that follows and click "I CONFIRM" button:

1. Hardware / software requirements: I hereby confirm that my hardware and software conform to the requirements of the course.

2. Prerequisite skills: I hereby confirm that my skills conform to the requirements of the course.

3. Course schedule: I hereby confirm that I have read the course schedule.

4. Assessment: I hereby confirm that I have read the assessment rubric.

To continue your registration process, please click on the button below.

I CONFIRM THE ABOVE STATEMENTS

To help the learner make sure the course "fits" as regards qualifications vs. requirements, it is advisable

To develop an elaborate screening test that enables the course administrator to screen applicants who are either severely underqualified, or apparently overqualified; this applies not only to computer-related skills, but to any other aspect as well;

To provide enough tools (online tutorials, mini-training sessions, self-assessment tests, quizzes, etc.);

To pay special attention to performance of learners during the first 2-3 weeks and offer additional help if you see some of them might need it.

Encouragement should be used sparingly: otherwise learners develop a feeling of being attended on by a babysitter, which eventually affects their confidence and ability to learn independently. By no means may an instructor show irritation – even if the learner keeps asking the same question for the fifth time within one week.

Learners have different learning styles: some are “social learners” and work best in teams; others prefer doing it alone. Hence, unless the nature of an assignment dictates otherwise, the option of working alone or joining a team should be left open. The first two or three assignments done in instructor-appointed and reshuffled teams are enough for the group to get to know each other; after that, whenever teamwork is assigned, it is better to give the learners a chance to team up with someone they prefer.

A Frequently Asked Questions page will drastically cut the number of questions the instructor has to answer.

Learners should be informed that their papers will not be graded instantly – usually it takes 4-5 days for the instructor to grade 25 papers. If this point is not stressed at the beginning of the courses, the learners tend to develop unrealistic expectations. A protocol should be developed to enable instructors have sufficient time for answering questions. Seeing their projects published on the course web site gives learners a feeling of accomplishment.

LA eLearning Center Mission Statement

This site was created with two main assumptions in mind:

1. Everything that can be digitized will eventually be digitized.

2. Computers will never replace teachers; however, teachers who do use computers will replace those who don't.

We offer courses for teachers who

- want to teach better, but not to overwork;
- believe that feeling good about their work does not necessarily go together with feeling dog-tired;
- are looking for a nice and easy way to learn some new skills and methods that will make their work more challenging and enjoyable;
- realize that studying from home makes more sense than commuting to the university;
- can organize their time and study without being prodded;
- are not computer-phobic.

…for teachers who have noticed that …

Every day thousands of people buy a new computer. More and more children grow in homes where computer is as common and habitual as a refrigerator or a TV set. For these kids, using a PC is as natural as writing or riding a bike. Tomorrow they will come to school; some of them are already school kids and will become students in a year or two.

Schools and especially universities are ready for this quiet revolution in education. More and more equipment finds its way to classrooms; more and more courses are offered in distance mode. Students who use computers with ease will certainly prefer to study without having to travel every day. Universities will benefit from it, too: they will accept more students without having to build more classrooms, light them, clean them, air-condition them, etc.

Most of the teaching/learning interaction will occur online: materials will be uploaded to websites and accessed from home; questions will be asked and answered via e-mail and chat; papers will be FTP-ed to instructors' folders for grading; message boards will replace university corridors.

e-Learning will soon be competing with conventional face-to-face instruction in many fields and countries; in some areas it will even squeeze the latter out to the periphery of the action field.

Today's pupils who will become e-learners tomorrow are quickly grasping the meaning of this and acquiring the skills needed for efficient integration into this new and exciting mode of knowledge acquisition. The new generation of learners will speak Computerese at a native-speaker level.

Teachers, on the other hand, seem to be lagging more and more behind. Imagine a teacher of writing who still uses his inkpot while all his pupils have already switched to ball-point pens. But a computer is just a smart pen, after all!

…for teachers who have noticed the advent of the new millennium.

Copyright © *2001 LA e-Learning Center:* *labra@netvision.net.il*, 13/7 Megiddo St., Ashkelon, Israel 78718 +972 (08) 678 2795 (Phone/Fax) +972 (050) 714705 (Mobile)

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Both Lev Abramov, M.Sc., and Natalie Martkovich, M.A., come from professional EFL background and were among early adopters of CALL. They have shared their experience in the field by teaching in-service courses in several Israeli universities and colleges; today they co-own and manage their own company for CALL-related online in-service courses for EFL teachers. Their teaching initiative and research are a grassroots venture derived from their practical involvement in the field. Lev is currently combining his work with postgraduate studies at the University of Southern Queensland.

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February 2002 ISSN 1537-5080 Vol. 16 : No. 2

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Editor's Note: Assessment is a flash point and catalyst for controversy - focused not only on Distance Learning versus Face to Face classes but also acceptance of materials by which student mastery is judged. Dr. Muirhead provides us with insightful research in assessment of assessment.

Relevant Assessment Strategies for Online Colleges & Universities

Brent Muirhead D.Min., Ph.D.

Introduction

It is important for teachers to have a clear vision of their roles and responsibilities to provide the best teaching strategies for their students. The instructor's role is a dynamic one that requires having individuals who are able to create a virtual climate that encourages meaningful individual and collaborative learning. Assessment is an important element in the teaching and learning process that challenges instructors to consider evaluation techniques that meet the learning needs of today's adult learners.

Importance of Assessment

The teacher's assessment strategies are significant because they provide a relational prompt for students and insights into the educational process. Evaluating the teaching and learning process involves a host of activities such as creating course objectives, gathering data from a variety of sources and often assigning grades for student work. Hopefully, relevant assessment methodology should accurately inform both the teacher and student about the quality of the learning experiences.

A holistic view of evaluation will consider it as a vital part of the entire teaching and learning process. Adult learning should be evaluated to help individuals learn of their strengths and academic deficiencies that can be corrected during and after a course or seminar. The student should be given information on the quality of their work to have accurate view of their learning. Additionally, the student should be given specific suggestions on how to improve their academic performance.

The process of assessment involves gathering information from a variety of sources to cultivate a rich and meaningful understanding of student learning. A primary aim of assessment is provide the necessary information to improve future educational experiences. Yet, it is vital that the assessment data be accurate and relevant to effectively make informed decisions about the curriculum. It requires taking the time to ask relevant questions that help evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching strategies and curriculum plans (Huba & Freed 2000).

Vella, Berardinelli & Burrow (1998) relate that an important purpose of evaluation is "to determine if all of the learners developed important knowledge, skills, and attitudes as a result of the program (p. 16)." This highlights that the evaluation of adult learning has a variety of instructional purposes and impacts various stakeholders who are interested in the educational process. Appropriate assessment instruments can offer valuable information to teachers, students and administrators. Ultimately, evaluation is important to the educational process because it provides feedback on whether the course and learning objectives have been achieved to satisfactory level.

Student-Centered Assessment Philosophy

A relevant approach to assessing adult learners supports a student centered educational philosophy. The focus involves helping individuals become more self-directed in their learning plans and activities. This is a situational goal that requires assessment procedures that acknowledges their needs, gifts and talents. Teachers must recognize that adults are autonomous learners who have varying degrees of independence in their study habits and desire relevance in the evaluation of their assignments (Caffarella, 1993).

The student-centered model of learning encourages teachers to view their students as academic partners who work together to produce relevant and meaningful learning experiences. It requires professors who are willing to change their standard teaching methods. Boud (1995) related "they will need to become researchers of student perceptions, designers of multifaceted assessment strategies, managers of assessment processes and consultants assisting students in the interpretation of rich information about their learning" (p. 42).

Huba & Freed (2000, p. 33) have noted eight features that are considered the hallmark of learner-centered teaching:

- Learners are actively involved and receive feedback.
- Learners apply knowledge to enduring and emerging issues and problems.
- Learners integrate discipline-based knowledge and general skills.
- Learners understand the characteristics of excellent work.
- Learners become increasingly sophisticated learners and knowers.
- Professors coach and facilitate, intertwining teaching and assessing.
- Professors reveal they are learners, too.
- Learning is interpersonal, and all learners---students and professors ---are respected and valued.

Assessment philosophy and practices must affirm that adult learners do vary in their needs due to such factors as having different cognitive experiences and educational backgrounds. Therefore, it is important that learning should be more individualized and offer significant connections to their personal and professional lives. Assessment procedures need to foster a meaningful bridge between academic knowledge, skills and experiences of the classroom to the student's daily job. Teachers are challenged to create evaluations that reflect respect for adult learners' experiences while promoting growth (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind & Tinker, 2000).

The advent of alternative assessments has come as the result of various educators who have been frustrated with the limitations of the conventional evaluation methods (Sanders, 2001). It is interesting that more traditional educators are using alternative assessment methods. There are two major differences between the traditional educator and those who use alternative assessment. The first is that the traditional educator is more dependent upon on fewer assignments to evaluate student performance. The traditional teacher will stress tests and term papers as their main resources for assessing student work. In contrast, teachers who use alternative assessment procedures will use a variety of assignments that might include portfolios, Power Point presentations, book reviews and interviews of study participants (Travis, 1996).

Alternative Assessments

Alternative assessment methods are promoted as a way to encourage authentic learning. Students are given a diversity of learning opportunities to display critical thinking skills, greater depth of knowledge, connect learning to their daily lives, develop a deeper dialog over the course material and foster both individual and group oriented learning activities. Alternative assessments offer teachers new perspectives on student learning such as insights to their individual learning styles. Yet, teachers have reported that alternative evaluation methods require large amounts of time to develop and integrate into the curriculum. It is wise to create a plan that alleviates the grading of student work by limiting the number and size of projects (Robinson, 1995).

Alternative assessment projects can encourage reflective thinking and self-directed learning activities involving the personal construction of knowledge. Students are taught to be knowledge creator's not just receivers of information. Teachers can promote higher order thinking skills by having evaluation procedures that allow students to vary their responses to questions (Davies, 1999). It is important that teachers communicate their evaluation criteria to their students to eliminate confusion over project expectations. It is essential that teachers provide clear criteria that supports high academic standards and brings consistency to the grading process. For instance, history teachers will need to create a rubric that will assess student knowledge and skills within that academic discipline (Drake, 2001).

Grading Rubric

The grading rubric represents an affirmation of learner-centered education. It is a public statement that strives to establish a greater level of trust between the teacher and student. It rejects the notion that grading is a special secret activity that only some of the learners can understand the instructor's actual grading procedures. Secondly, it is designed to establish a set of instructional expectations and standards for the course. A rubric provides an instrument for student feedback that promotes assessment of learning. A good rubric will reveal valuable data on how the student's work compares to the course standards. Rubrics are significant because of their capacity to clearly reveal vital information to students that enable them to improve their knowledge and skill levels (Huba & Freed 2000).

Rubrics have the potential to be excellent assessment tools because they offer students a vision of what the teacher is seeking to accomplish in the class and why it is important. A rubric can indicate

whether students will be expected to explore knowledge beyond the assigned textbooks. Students need to know the skills and knowledge expertise that are expected within a course. Therefore, students want to have an accurate understanding what is considered good performance. Teachers can use a rubric to demonstrate how a particular set of skills and knowledge will compare with class objectives, educated individuals and even within a professional field or academic discipline. Students appreciate that the information they are learning are truly valued in their field of work and not just a preference of an individual teacher. In fact, some teachers will invite students to provide their thoughts on a rubric before it is finalized to insure that the rubric is relevant to their students (Huba & Freed 2000).

The use of rubrics is one way to help promote effective evaluation procedures that reduces subjective grading procedures and offer student relevant information on their academic performance. Huba & Freed (2000) have outlined five key elements for creating a rubric:

1. **levels of mastery**- achievement is described according to terms such as excellent, good, needs improvement and unacceptable.
2. **dimensions of quality**- assessment can address a variety of intellectual or knowledge competencies that target a specific academic discipline or involve multiple disciplines.
3. **organizational groupings**- students are assessed for multidimensional skills such as teamwork that involves problem solving techniques and various aspects of group dynamics.
4. **commentaries**- this element of the rubric provides a detailed description of the defining features that should be found in the work. The instructor creates the categories for what is considered as being excellent, sophisticated or exemplary.
5. **descriptions of consequences**-this is a unique rubric feature that offers students insight into various lessons of their work in a real life setting (i.e. professionalism).

The five rubric elements offer trainers and educators rich categories to develop their evaluation procedures to fit their student population and various academic disciplines.

Alternative Assessment Methods: Journal Writing

Reflective journals are an excellent way to evaluate student learning. Journal writing can be an effective way to gather insights into student attitudes and a practical format to enhance student-teacher communication (Robinson, 1995). The journal writing assignments can be structured to address the primary course learning objectives. At the University of Phoenix, online doctoral students integrate journal writing in their Doctor of Management degree program. The students can use their journals to meet a variety of learning needs such as reflecting on research studies that are important to their dissertation. Muirhead (2001) shares seven major advantages to journal writing:

- **Provides an aid to our memory**- researchers and writers have learned the value of recording their ideas for future use.
- **Provide a basis for creating new perspectives**- it creates a framework to explore relationships and arguments between ideas.
- **Enhances critical thinking skills**- learning to analyze the underlying assumptions of our actions and those of others is a very liberating process.
- **Provides psychological/emotional advantages**- it enables individuals to work through difficult work or personal situations that can promote healing and growth.
- **Offers opportunities to increase empathy for others**- individuals can address social issues and enhance their understanding of our society and world.
- **Provides a way to practical way to understand books/articles**- writing creates a format to regularly examine reading materials and improve our ability to comprehend and recall knowledge.
- **Provides support for self-directed learning activities-** journal writing requires personal discipline and establishing individual learning goals to complete journaling assignments.

Teachers can use journal writing in a variety of academic disciplines as a creative way to enrich their instructional activities. It is essential that teachers provide timely and constructive feedback to help students have the time to make the necessary changes in their work before turning in their next assignment.

Conclusion

The student-centered learning model challenges teachers to carefully use descriptive language in their written and verbal comments to their students. Teachers must develop dialogues with their students that foster personal and professional growth. Obviously, the language of assessment must be caring and honest while providing constructive feedback that helps the learner have a clear picture of their academic work.

Critics of alternative assessments raise legitimate concerns about excessive administrative time to prepare and grade assignments. Yet, alternative assessments offer teachers unique opportunities to create relevant work that promotes academic achievement and individualizes the educational process. It is important to help new and veteran teachers become more familiar with alternative assessments through classes, workshops and other professional development activities (Liebers, 1999).

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EDUCATION ed AT A DISTANCE

USDLA Journal

A REFEREED JOURNAL OF THE UNITED STATES DISTANCE LEARNING ASSOCIATION

February 2002 ISSN 1537-5080 Vol. 16 : No. 2

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Editor's Note: In this article, Ms. Land provides integration of extensive field experience and perceptive research. She offers Distance Learning students excellent articulation of these two paths for success and evaluation of learning models.

Experiencing the Online Environment

Denise L. Land

"Let the Knowledge Olympics begin. The torch of e-learning is ablaze"
(Bersch, 2001, p. 32).

Introduction

The distance-learning environment taps into the innovation of technology to offer a flexible and engaging adult learning opportunity. Students engaged in distance learning are able to learn anytime, anywhere, in a collaborative learning community. Online learning promotes the globalization of adult learning by opening the boundaries of learning (Neo & Eng, 2001).

Online Learning Benefits

Traditional institutions of higher education are met with the triple challenge of keeping education activities moving forward, supplementing research opportunities or expanding customary classroom offerings with e-learning opportunities and, of course, keeping an eye on their profit margins. Competition from accredited online universities leaves traditional institutions scrambling for innovative avenues that will salvage long-existing traditions of academia.

University of Phoenix-Online now advertises via television in the fashion of correspondence schools, but with a product that surpasses traditional institutions of higher education by providing-instant entree to online libraries, study groups, and anytime, anywhere access to learning. The benefits of e-learning include:

(a) lightning-fast materials access;

(b) convenience;

(c) improved learning retention;

(d) real-world application;

(e) practicality, flexibility and learning consistency;

(f) just-in-time information for career-active students;

(g) global incorporation of new concepts;

(h) minimal disruption of family and work life responsibilities;

(i) elimination of space, time and geographical constraints;

(j) increased peer interaction due to the collaborative learning environment;

(k) increased interaction with more accessible teachers;

(l) increased quality of learning with deeper critical reflection; and,

(m) a methodical construction of ideas; and,

(n) increased access to information and other resources not available in traditional environments.

Online Dialogue Engagement -- Challenges, Value, Sharing

Lifelong learning is important to keep individuals competitive and up-to-date in a fast passed, competitive, knowledge-based business economy. To stay ahead, employees must seek ways to improve themselves even when they have full-time employment. Distance learning online programs allow adult learners to combine learning, family and work responsibilities.

The distance-learning environment is never static, but reflects the dynamism of the learning communities. The dialog of the online classroom stimulates the learning environment in which students interact with each other to expand their ideas via electronic forums and communication tools such as learning group discussion, bulletin boards, internet relay chat, newsgroup discussion, E-mails, etc. (Atwong et al, 1996; Natesan & Natesan, 1996; Seibert 1996; Siegel, 1996). This model assumes that learning is a social activity and learners tap the learning network to verbalize their thoughts. The technological advantage of online classrooms promotes active group learning through computer-mediated dialogs (Cordell, 1996). There is never a dull moment online due to the interactive nature of collaborative learning. In addition, the somewhat impersonal online medium promotes greater student reflection.

For the student, online learning provides:

· Greater cognitive development.

· Critical thinking skills to challenge assumptions.

· Exploration to further professional practice.

· Empowerment of professionals to heighten personal responsibility toward creating social change.

· Discovery of new knowledge.

The challenges of online learning include:

(a) technical frustration due to the total reliance on technology and outside support systems;

(b) increased time-on-task due to the slowness of the medium and the higher volume of messages, which can also contribute to feelings of information overload;

(c) possible miscommunication due to the loss of visual cues and confusion in the sequence of events; and,

(d) disjointed flow of communication because of the asynchronous time frame.

Distance Learning Assignments: Papers Relevant to Real-life Issues

The reflective writing practice of online learning environments is a highly interactive learning activity that requires students to reflect upon their readings, classroom discussions, and application of content to their personal and professional experiences. The learner regularly submits written materials to the teacher for review and feedback. Papers are an excellent medium for teacher-student dialogue. They serve to strengthen the student's self-understanding while increasing the teacher's understanding of the student's insights and abilities.

Working in Learning Teams
Johnson and Johnson (2000) describe an effective face-to-face learning group as operating from a collaborative mutual goal structure. Learning teams allow students to virtually cross international borders for collaboration so that "learners actively construct knowledge by formulating ideas into words that are shared with and built upon through the reactions and responses of others" (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, & Turoff, 1995, p. 4).

By working in networked groups and learning real-world tasks, learners are encouraged to develop personal understanding and meaning. In addition, the distance learning environment promotes a cross fertilization of ideas. Technology enhanced team collaboration allows learners to communicate ideas and exchange views with distant partners from around the world whose perspectives might differ dramatically from their own. Learning team members often comprise members from different backgrounds, schools, countries, etc, who are united in a mutual learning goal. To be successful, team members must develop skills to build relationships quickly and to work together effectively despite the physical distance between them. Establishing a learning team partnership charter can help in planning work, setting deadlines, comparing understanding of key issues, and sharing sources of information such as useful web sites, books, journals, and contacts.

Strategies Helpful for Online Student Success

By its very nature, distance education relies heavily on the individual students' ability to manage and control their personal and situational circumstances to be successful. Academic achievement correlates with more positive internal beliefs (Riipinen, 1994; Phares,1976; Findley & Cooper, 1983). These include: competitiveness, motivation to learn for its own sake rather than for performance, and motivation to avoid failure (Platow & Shave, 1995; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Thorne, 1995). In reflection, additional keys to success include: (a) the ability to balance student studies with other personal and work commitments; (b) comprehensive orientation to expectations and learning objectives; (c) universal and user-friendly technology support; (d) a positive attitude about overcoming obstacles and challenges; (d) write it down -- journalize achievements, learnings and useful resources; and, (e) getting appropriate training to master basic academic skills, such as library and writing skills is especially helpful. For the adult learner, the principles of online learning are compatible with the strategies of adult learning that include: self-directed learning, using past experience as a resource base for learning, fitting knew knowledge into current work and personal life situations, real-life problems-solving advantages, and time-management advantages for the time conscious student.

Teacher Assessment and Feedback – What is the Most Helpful!

For teachers, facilitating a distance-learning program is a very different skill from lecturing or other forms of instruction in which the teacher dominates. Teachers need to be able to assess students' readiness for such learning and guide them from a position of dependence to independence. Teachers should provide a structure, in terms of offering guidance, checking plans, suggesting resources, and clarifying the basis on which work will be judged.

Teachers have all heard the call "Back to Basics!" Effective strategies include: (a) creating an awareness of the strategy to be learned, (b) modeling the strategy, (c) providing practice in the use of the strategy, and (d) applying the strategy in real-life situations. The most in-depth and perhaps most important goal of teaching is to enhance comprehension, learning is more meaningful when students are active participants. We all remember best that in which we take an active part.

Higher-level critical thinking skills are an important part of comprehension. Asking questions that cause students to use inductive thinking is important. Another strategy is to provide activities that are open ended and allow students the opportunity to come up with a variety of answers. In addition, having to explain how they arrived at their choice and discerning whether or not they have used logical thinking is also important to student development.

Conclusion

For the student eager to engage in the advantages and stimulation of an active adult learning environment distance learning online education programs are highly advantageous. Few learning opportunities can provide the combination of enriched collaborative learning environments offered by a quality online environment with the freedom and flexibility advantages necessary for the success and inclusion of active professionals. In addition, the collegial support of cohort learning partners and professors with professional experience greatly enrich the environment, the learning challenge, and the learning outcomes.

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February 2002 ISSN 1537-5080 Vol. 16 : No. 2

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Editor's Note: Dr. Guy Bensusan was a leader of interactive distance learning for more than thirty of the fifty years he dedicated to the teaching of Humanities, Arts, History and Culture. Much of his work has been published in USDLA Journal over the past seven years. We are pleased to continue to publish the essence of his explorations and ideas about learning. He would encourage us, were he still with us, to adapt and experiment with his ideas rather than to imitate them. Please address all inquiries to USDLA Journal Editors, eperrin@pacbell.net

Thoughts on Learning and Fostering It

Guy Bensusan

· Information is a basic component of learning and memorizing is a low rung on the learning-ladder whether one follows Bloom, Brookfield, Dewey, Freire, Knowles, Maslow, Piaget or Vygotsky.

· What learners DO with information and the realization spectrum, while they digest, consider and massage elements into sensible order, is what constitutes the PROCESS and the LEARNING.

· Learning is personal, individual and occurs day-by-day -- even if one only becomes conscious of new acquisition from time to time.

· In learning, one crosses many one-way thresholds, gains vistas previously unseen, is altered by each, and is unable to go back.

· Each climbing of the learning stairway will reveal something not previously seen; it was there all the time, but the learner was not yet ready to take it in.

· You cannot learn for others nor they for you; you CAN augment learning with cooperation and non-competitive sharing.

· Some learners pioneer, others lead, many follow, while some will watch, wait and come along when they are ready. Their alleged "failure" to learn is often caused by externally imposed constraints and outlooks.

· Since learning styles are individual in form and pace, nearly any productive path serves initially. Others can be suggested, practiced and acquired. Learners will later augment their own initial learning preferences.

· Learners learn more by reading, writing and interacting with others on the subject than by listening to experts.

· Through their writings and conversations with each other, learners reveal how they think, understand and substantiate; teachers who watch and listen with open minds find clues for fostering

growth.

· A learning-centered teacher will ask questions to help move along the inquiry, engagement and choice-making thus building awareness of causes, implications, side effects, parallels, contrasts and consequences.

· Standing back and allowing learners to do their learning is often difficult for teachers with expertise who feel they must "cover lots of material". That expertise can be accessed in other ways besides lecture.

· Most learning does not come with a single intuitive ZAP as we are fed to believe in comic strips. We learn via many small steps in succession, interspersed with occasional larger ones.

· We need to remind ourselves often that we are designing for LEARNING and not for INSTRUCTION.

· Repetition and alteration patterns used in music, rhythm and dance are vital exercises: create a step, do it again, add something, repeat it, alter it, repeat both, continue to add another consideration each time.

· Offering help to learners can be tricky, since prior obedience to direction from teachers has been deeply conditioned. Indirection is usually more productive than direction.

· Internal guidance is a long-range goal for learners, but switchover is not easy and requires practice, practice, practice, plus opportunity to make mistakes, recognize them and redirect the process.

· It helps to set up a stairway of asynchronous interactions allowing learners to learn on their own time and computers, without feeling intimidated by classroom pressures.

· If synchronous time is available it can well be used for discussion among the learners and their visions of problem solving about asynchronous work.

· Suggesting several alternative paths (at least three -- to avoid the traps of either-or), allows learners to establish criteria for their choice making, and gain experience through practice that makes these formulations come faster and more easily.

· Super-performance is not a useful goal for beginning learners. Encourage exploration and fumbling around, as well as help them make many small pieces they can assemble in various ways and evaluate.

· When learners explore meanings, they construct their own orientation, develop confidence and become willing to offer help to others. Sharing learning in a constructive environment builds teams and communities.

· Encourage learning about criteria for solid, reasoned and excellent work. Encourage learners to assess each other's writing by asking questions about ideas and how things fit together.

· Let learners help each other create standards with justifications they think should be supported.

· Encourage them to have patience with each other and themselves as they build their own stairways. Help them see and practice how to get through the many steps in various ways.

· Be willing to discuss several diverse interpretations of events, causes and consequences in order to help learners gain practice with explanation tools.

· It is highly acceptable to express a personal preference for one interpretation or school over another, especially where explanations will help learners comprehend the rationales, data and assumptions underlying them.

· Help learners climb their own stairways and LET them. If in doubt as to whether to intervene,

count to ten slowly and then wait another day -- by then it often will not be necessary.

· Work yourself out of the job as early as you can in the semester, but stick around, watch and make certain everyone gets all the way through.

· These matters are ever more an ongoing activity for a lifetime as the velocity of our cultural changes accelerates.

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Student Exchange

Teacher As Student

What happens when the teacher becomes the learner?

Or Teachers in the Paradigm Swing

With increased online learning mandated by the Academic and Professional Marketplace, instructors frequently become learners in other teachers' classrooms. In perhaps uncomfortable role reversal situations, instructors are more and more frequently "going back to school." They have become a new set of learners in Distance Learning online and experience, from an ambiguous perspective, the same fears and frustrations as their fellow students. The teacher qua learner becomes unwilling to "go public" in conferences and chat sessions until he or she feels secure in the new learning environment. Perhaps the culture is different, the requirements are unclear, the content is new, or the technology is challenging. I have seen colleagues with great professional skill who, when placed in the unknown online learning environment, exhibited the neuroses and uncertainty they felt way back as freshman in college.

I have just finished an excellent and intensive online course required by University of Maryland University College UMUC) for experienced F2F instructors assigned to teach their first online class. Local students had a classroom component. Three thousand miles away, I took the course entirely online. I was totally bewildered by immersion in new and rich experiences in a discipline where I (previously) had considered myself an expert. I had not allocated enough time to do justice to these opportunities. I became a lurker, unwilling to show myself until I understood what was happening. I was always behind, and fearful of being dropped from the course. Finally, I dropped everything else I was doing in order to participate (and pass!).

Here are some of my parameters for online learning. Success of online learning requires group participation. Presentations from the faculty should be purposefully short to "set the stage" for dialog and contributions of class members. Many class members bring professional experience; others have questions. There is time enough to do research and dialog to develop the topic in a way not possible in a traditional classroom. When people really "get into it," the collective sharing of experience is rich and exciting.

Conferences are initiated by the instructor. There may be several each week; each requires reading, research skills, and dialog. The resulting interactions and issues that develop day-by-day are addictive – the academic equivalent of *Survivor*.

In *Study Groups*, student-teams, guided gently by the teacher, need to set their own goals and schedules and assume responsibility for the entire project and report. Every team is unique. Usually a leader emerges. Some groups subdivide tasks and appoint an editor to integrate the results. Others share research via email, chat rooms, and posting to the study-group web page. As the report or project is assembled, each member adds-to and edits the page. It is a lesson in teamwork and trust. One of the truly unique experiences attached to successful online learning is that of teamwork and

trust.

I have always been suspicious that conferences and chat rooms don't produce a lot of substance. I was wrong. As Keller's research indicates, the learner needs clear goals, knowledge of value, and confidence of success. It is the instructor's job to set the stage and get the ball rolling. I found I learned a great deal. My knowledge, skills, and attitudes were changed and bettered by the course, which, although I sometimes thought it would never end, was over all too soon. The following week I returned to my instructor role, but it will never be the same.

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TECHNOLOGY EXCHANGE

NTII (National Tele-Immersion Initiative).

The following information and website offer a significantly different dimension from the usual praxis and theories of current "front- runner" concepts of Distance Learning.

The link we strongly recommend as reference for "tele-immersion" is extensive and warrants some perusal time: http://www.internet2.edu/html/tele-immersion.html.

For a brief overview of the concept, we are providing this information from the link. The graphics are spectacular and the envisioned applications of the concepts are inspiring.

"Tele-Immersion (National Tele-immersion Initiative - NTII) will enable users at geographically distributed sites to collaborate in real time in a shared, simulated environment as if they were in the same physical room. This new paradigm for human computer interaction is the ultimate synthesis of networking and media technologies and, as such, it is the greatest technical challenge for Internet2.

To ensure that these new environments become a reality, Advanced Network & Services has acted as a catalyst in bringing together recognized experts in virtual reality and networking led by VP pioneer, Jaron Lanier. The results of our research effort will be an objective voice and a factual basis for the creation of networks for the future."

As of 2000, there were three universities sponsored by Advanced Network & Services, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Brown University, and Pennsylvania University, involved in realization of Tele Immersion.

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STATE EXCHANGE

ADEC Summit XIII in California

The Alliance for Distance Education in California, ADEC, will host its annual meeting, Summit XIII, April 3-6, at the Marriott Hotel, Manhattan Beach, California. ADEC is an affiliate of USDLA and is the largest of the state chapters with over 200 members. ADEC has successfully implemented its commitment to promote partnerships and collaborations across all levels of education, pre-school through university, lifelong learning, and corporate and industrial training.

For more information, contact Kitty Salinas, President Elect: salinas_kitty@lacoe.edu

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STATE EXCHANGE

Certificate in Distributed Learning

Portland State University has a Certificate in Distributed Learning that might be of interest to some of you who are newly arrived in the Distance Learning arena. The program consists of six courses, five focused on specific areas and a sixth course, the Distributed Learning Capstone. These are all completely online courses, three credits each and garner full graduate credit in the Graduate School of Education as well as the Certificate.

For more information, contact Maggie McVay Lynch, Ed.D., Portland State University http://web.pdx.edu/~mmlynch

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STATE EXCHANGE

USDLA STATE CHAPTERS

Calendar of Events

April 2-4 2002. Texas Distance Learning Association 2002 Fifth Annual Conference in Ft. Worth, Texas. To get to conference information, visit

http://www.txdla.org/events/2002conf/index.htm.

April 3-6, 2002 - 13th Annual Leadership Summit (K-12, HE, CORP, GOV) “Ride the Wave in Distance Learning” - special invitation to chapter leaders, Manhattan Beach Marriott Hotel Resort, Manhattan Beach CA.
Visit www.adec-cal.org for more information.

April 4-5, 2002. Iowa Distance Learning Conference "New Horizons in Distance Education -- Making Connections." Des Moines Area Community College. See www.idla.org for

more information.

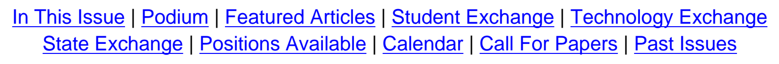
April 8-11, 2002. USDLA sponsored National Distance Learning Week.

April 8-11, 2002. e-Learning 11th Annual Conference and Exposition (formerly TeleCon East) in Washington, DC . For more information see: http://www.elearningexpos.com.

April 17-19, 2002. Maryland Distance Learning Association is sponsoring "Practical Magic: the Synergy of Learning and Technology" at the Annapolis Sheraton, in Annapolis, MD. For more information: http://www.marylanddla.org/spring_conf.htm.

June 5-7, 2002. The Nebraska Summit on Distance Learning sponsored by the Nebraska Distance Learning Association at the Peter Kiewit Institute for Information Science, Technology, and Engineering in Omaha, Nebraska. For more information: http://www.cccneb.edu .

June 12-14, 2002. USDLA Summer Board Meeting in San Antonio, TX.



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February 2002 | ISSN 1537-5080 | Vol. 16 : No. 2

E-mail comments to the Editor

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STATE EXCHANGE

Technology Costing Methodology

One of the most frequent queries we receive has to do with costs of Distance Learning. To deal with the ongoing "Costing" and "Cost analyses" for Distance Learning, WICHE, Western Interstate Cooperative of Higher Education, has posted on the web WICHE's Technology Costing Methodology guidelines, which include a TCM Handbook, a TCM Casebook and a TCM Tabulator (an electronic spreadsheet). These may prove quite helpful in providing insights and answers to the fiscal questions and more. www.wiche.edu/wcet/projects/tcm/index.htm

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POSITIONS available

University of Alaska, Anchorage

There are two interesting positions open at the University of Alaska, Anchorage:

1) Director - IT Infrastructure Services

2) Director - Academic Technology Services.

Both positions report to the Chief Information Officer. Anchorage is not as cold as many parts of Alaska and many northern American cities. More information may be obtained at www.finsys.uaa.alaska.edu/uaahrs or via phone, 907-786.4608.

E-mail comments to the Editor

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