

EDUCATION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

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Some 340 years ago Harvard was founded with a clear purpose which was, "To advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust." There was one curriculum that lasted for three years and was taught by one professor, the president. All students were preparing for one occupation, the ministry. Whatever may have been the problems of the nine students in Harvard's first graduating class, making educational choices was not one of them.

Today, there are over two million classes taught in 3,000 institutions, offering over 1500 separate degrees.¹ Add to those statistics the fact that altogether those 3,000 colleges and universities provide less than half of all organized instruction for adults, and you can see why a National Conference on Educational Choices is timely. Whatever the complaints about education from today's students, lack of options should not be one of them.

Throughout the history of higher education, each generation of learners has had more choice than the previous generation, and there is every indication that options will continue to increase, in traditional as well as nontraditional education. I believe that the single most valuable lesson

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educators could teach young people is how to select their lifelong learning options wisely.

Learners today face a staggering array of choices along four dimensions that might be labeled the what, where, when, and how of education. Since the days of the single major at Harvard in 1640, the choice of what to study has exploded into more than 90 possible majors on one college campus, with roughly 30 majors available on the typical campus today. Within each major, the number of courses offered ranges from a median of 20 courses per major in community colleges to 70 in research universities. Some research universities offer majors with more than 250 courses from which to choose (Levine, 1978). In the unlikely event that one cannot find precisely the right course among the ready-mades, there is the possibility of a custom-made major and even individually-designed courses within majors.

In ticking off the choices learners must make about what to study, let us remember that college courses for credit represent only the tip of the iceberg in the learning society. Fewer than 10 percent of the adults who participate in organized learning activities are engaged in degree studies (Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1974). When a sample of adults in California were asked to name the one subject they would most like to study, there were 167 different first choice selections among the 600 respondents (Hefferlin, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1975).

There is a great deal of talk among financially-strapped colleges these days about setting priorities and making hard choices. I suppose it is possible that the range of subject matter offerings might be restricted in

future years, but I for one, would be very surprised if that turned out to be the case. I think it far more likely that choices of subject matter will continue to escalate, inside and outside the formal educational system.

Where one learns offers almost as many choices as what in these days of the emerging learning society. About 11 million students are learning on college campuses, and those campuses range from small intimate colleges where everyone knows everyone else, to huge campuses where students know others in their immediate vicinity of class or dormitory, to urban commuter campuses where some students may never know more than one or two fellow students or faculty members. Students can choose almost any kind of campus imaginable, including no campus. At Great Britain's foremost noncampus university, 46,000 undergraduates completed courses last year, and the United States seems destined to beat Open University at its own game with some 54,000 students enrolled in more than 200 accredited external degree programs (Sosdian, 1978). The University of Mid-America has enrolled more than 10,000 students since its beginning in 1974, and non-enrolled viewers of UMA classes are estimated to run hundreds of times that figure (McNeil, 1979). The place of learning for most of these students was their own livingroom, sometimes combined with a regional learning center.

When we look beyond degree students to find out where learning takes place, research indicates that school buildings of any type are used by fewer than one-third of all adults who are receiving instruction (Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1974). The remaining two-thirds are using community buildings, homes, and industrial and business sites. Thus the concept of the learning society

refers not just to the "greying of the campus" but also to the fact that education is no longer a monopoly for educational institutions. Employers are increasingly into the education business, conducting on-the-job training for employees, workshops for professionals, and think tanks for executives. In 1975, the nation's 7500 largest employers spent over two billion dollars on employee education (Lusterman, 1977), and almost one-quarter of the adults who are participating each year in organized learning activities are doing so under the auspices of their employer or a professional or labor organization (Boaz, 1978). It occurs to me that my own education these days takes place most often in hotels such as this one. Although hotels do not seem to have made their way into most research surveys inquiring about where people do their learning, I suspect that hotels are probably the single most common learning location for professionals. It is almost impossible to walk into a hotel, whether in a resort area, a city, or near an airport, and not find some kind of conference or short course for the continuing education of adults who are attempting to improve their job competencies.

I won't detail the choices available with respect to when people learn. Suffice it to say that one may choose to earn college credit through the traditional three hours a week for a semester, through eight hours a day for a weekend, through four weeks in an intersession, day or night, winter or summer, weekday or weekend. I suppose the national fascination with learning must slacken off a bit between midnight and 6 a.m., but Sunrise Semester is the first thing on the television in the morning, and courses don't lack for lifelong learners eager to expand their knowledge about the world.

Traditional colleges have probably been more flexible about offering so-called nontraditional schedules for adult learners than about any other change. Self-paced courses are increasingly common, as are weekend colleges. Elderhostel, a summertime block-scheduled, on-campus program for the elderly has grown from five colleges and 200 participants in 1974 to 129 colleges and 11,000 students today.

When one schedules learning activities is not always a matter of free choice, of course. While most working adults cannot attend daytime classes, there is still a large amount of choice in whether they learn through distributed class periods of evening college or Sunrise Semester or whether they elect the more concentrated schedule of alumni weekend college or Elderhostel.

The question of how learners will choose to learn is one of the most fascinating, and it has been given more attention in the lifelong learning movement than in traditional education where lecture/discussion courses still predominate. Recent research on adult learners shows that the typical adult spends about 500 hours per year on major learning efforts. Most of this learning is self-planned; only about 20 percent is planned by a professional (Tough, 1978). When adults were asked why they chose to learn on their own instead of taking a class, the most common responses had a lot to do with how people learn. In rank order, the three most common reasons for self-planned learning were: desire to set their own pace, desire to design their own structure, and a desire to use their own style of learning (Penland, 1977).

Those learning outside the formal educational system retain maximum opportunity to choose their own method, but even within the formal educational system, the choices available to the average undergraduate are escalating rapidly. Several years ago I conducted a systematic survey of the range of teaching methods that were being used in one small aspect of college instruction, namely basic skills programs in community colleges. I found that in 1970 few colleges were offering many alternatives to the standard classroom procedures. Within the short time span of four years, however, over two-thirds of the developmental studies programs offered one or more of the following: skills centers, peer tutoring, programmed instruction, self-paced individualized study, and instruction emphasizing the use of audiovisual aids (Cross, 1976). Nationwide, the once revolutionary, self-paced, Personalized System of Instruction (PSI) has become almost commonplace in research universities as well as community colleges. From its modest beginnings of 100 courses in 1971, PSI as an instructional methodology has spread to an estimated 12,000 courses today.² Evaluation studies indicate that students experiencing PSI courses generally prefer them to lecture courses in the same subjects (Kozma, et al., 1978).

As more and more people experience a variety of teaching/learning methods, I would expect the preferences and demands for alternatives to traditional classroom procedures to rise. Although many faculty insist that nothing will ever replace the standard lecture as a sound educational technique, that seems a little like saying that nothing will ever replace meat and potatoes as the standard American diet. Tastes do change, and as people are exposed to alternatives, whether in diet or in education, large numbers are likely to find something that suits their particular needs better than the standard fare.

The what, where, when, and how dimensions of learning are not, of course, independent. What one studies determines to some extent how and where. Nevertheless, lifelong learners will be faced with a staggering array of choices, and like any other consumer, they will make wise choices to the extent that they are knowledgeable about three things:

1. Learners need knowledge about themselves, as learners--their needs, preferences, and in general what "works" for them.
2. Potential learners need accurate, up-to-date information about the educational options available.
3. Learners need to have some understanding about how to match their learning needs to available opportunities.

Of these, we are probably making more headway on Step 2 than on either Step 1 or Step 3. There are several major efforts now to provide learners with accurate, up-to-date information about their options. The CHOICE project is offering excellent leadership in the so-called traditional collegiate sphere by helping colleges provide better descriptions about their programs and learning environments. While the ultimate purpose of CHOICE is to strike a good match between student needs and college learning environments, they work primarily with colleges to provide better information to students. The Nebraska project is working the other side of the street. Their course in Learning Analysis is an attempt to help students learn about themselves and their learning needs so that they know what kinds of learning experiences to look for among the array of options that exist.

The division of labor is similar in the broader world of adult education and lifelong learning. Each state has been given modest federal funding for Education Information Centers (EIC). The task of the EICs is to collect and disseminate information about educational opportunities for adults. That task is so huge that most EICs are not yet giving much attention to the consumer descriptions that concern the CHOICE project, but a comprehensive list of the learning options is a necessary first step in meeting consumer needs for information. Working the other side of the street in the realm of adult education are the educational brokering services. Educational brokers work primarily with learners, helping them to assess their needs and to select the options that best meet those needs.

It is my understanding that this National Conference on Educational Choices was planned to provide an overview of the activities that are underway to work with learners, on the one hand, to help them assess and understand their needs and to work with institutions and providers of educational services, on the other hand, to help them furnish the kind of information that is useful and helpful to learners and potential learners. Ultimately, whether we are working primarily with providers or learners, within colleges or outside of them, all of us share the common goal of desiring to improve the match between learners and educational resources.

That task has become steadily more complicated since the good old days at Harvard when choices were few. Given present trends, our problems with the learning society are not going to lie in providing opportunities nor in attracting students. They are going to be in cutting through the enormous

growth in choices to establish matches that make sense for learners and providers.

Education is not the first big industry in our society to cope with the problem--or opportunities--of choice. I find some interesting parallels between choices in education and choices in the cooking and dining industry in recent years. Today's food consumer is faced with a staggering variety of choices. The problem is not really to get more options, but to select wisely those that best meet one's needs with respect to taste, nutrition, and pocketbook. The more consumers know about their own tastes and needs, on the one hand, and about ingredients and cuisines, on the other, the more likely they are to make a satisfying match.

The report of the Carnegie Council on Missions of the College Curriculum (1977, p. 4) says that we are now entering the era of consumerism in college curricula. "The student of today," says the Council, "is less likely to be the youth who is the passive recipient of the offerings of the faculty expert and more likely to be the adult--sometimes one of many organized adults--shopping around." Although many educators disdain the consumerism of today's education, it is undeniable, I think, that knowledgeable consumers represent one of the most effective routes to improved quality.

The gourmet cooking movement has demanded and received greater variety and improved quality from restaurateurs, manufacturers of cooking equipment, cooking schools (whether in France or in the local community college or with Julia Child on television) and from the publishers of cookbooks and specialized magazines ranging from artichokes to wines. Without question, large numbers

of knowledgeable cooks with developed tastes have stimulated the economy of the cooking and dining industry as well as their imagination and responsiveness to consumer demand. Perhaps it is not too much to hope that knowledgeable consumers of learning programs, procedures, and materials might eventually do the same for education.

But let's face it, most learners, whether traditional 18 year olds or nontraditional 40 year olds, are not gourmet learners, and educators must assume some responsibility for the lack of good taste in learning experiences that seems to predominate in today's consumer market.

Our formal school system is predicated on the assumption that the more experience students have with learning, the more choices they are offered--presumably because they have learned from experience how to make choices. Inexperienced learners in elementary school, for instance, are given few choices. Their curriculum and materials are largely prepackaged by the teacher on the grounds that the child is a novice in learning and has little experience in selecting learning resources from the environment and combining them into a nourishing learning program. But inexperienced learners of any age may be unable to select a nourishing course of study and thus may be largely dependent on prepackaged education. If the learner has not developed a taste for anything more distinctive, prepackaged education like prepackaged meals may be quite adequate and, if not indulged in too often, perhaps even a good buy. The sacrifice is that prepackaging is usually designed for the mass market, and there is little opportunity for individual variation.

By the time young people get to high school and college, they are offered educational programs more like recipes than like prepackaged mixes. They may select a major, but the ingredients of the educational recipes are specified along with the amounts of each ingredient that will lead to a balanced program. The use of a recipe is more satisfying to the intermediate cook than the prepackaged meal because it can be adjusted to individual needs. The intermediate learner of any age needs more knowledge about ingredients and desired end products than the consumer of prescribed education, but the choice of a major plus electives permits some individual variation. Unfortunately most high schools and colleges do little to move students from the status of intermediate to gourmet learners. The lifelong learning movement, however, assumes that there is going to be an opportunity for gourmet learners, as well as for novices and intermediate learners.

For adult learners the choices are wide and the variability great. The sophisticated learner might create, from a wide variety of resources, a self-directed program of learning. Most of the new programs that have been specifically designed for adults, such as the program at Empire State College, are aimed at the gourmet market in adult learning. If learners are not sophisticated consumers of educational ingredients when they arrive, they are helped to become so through the process of creating a learning contract that spells out their unique needs and fulfills their developed tastes as learners. Like the gourmet chef, the gourmet learner needs a clear vision of the end product that is desired and enough knowledge about choices, ingredients, and methods to create a dish that satisfies the developed taste of its creator.

The gourmet learner is a designer and creator of good learning experiences as well as an intelligent consumer.

In increasing the amount of choice presented to learners as they advance through the educational system from elementary school to adult education, we assume that older learners are more experienced learners and therefore more sophisticated consumers of educational offerings. I am not at all sure that that assumption is justified. Perhaps that is one reason for the great concern about the quality of much of adult education. If adults don't know good education from bad, they must be protected through regulation, and there are many efforts now to bring so-called nontraditional alternatives under closer regulation. To deal with the immediate problem that may be necessary, but in the long run, I suspect that most of us would prefer the model that is implied, if not out-and-out advocated, in the program of this conference, i.e., to develop more knowledgeable consumers and provide them with more adequate information about educational choices.

Ultimately, I believe the role of educators is to help people of all ages develop a taste for good learning experiences and to choose from a wide variety of learning resources those which best meet their needs at the time. I believe so strongly in that goal that several years ago I attempted to see if education--or a tiny piece of it--could be oriented toward preparing college students more adequately for their future role as lifelong learners.

In 1975, the opportunity presented itself for me to spend a ten month leave of absence at the University of Nebraska as Visiting University Professor. My assignment was to see what I might contribute to the University's commitment

to improve undergraduate teaching and learning, on and off the campus. Operating on the premise that knowledgeable consumers represent a powerful and underutilized lever for improved education, I proposed to the University and to the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education that the University (and four other Nebraska colleges) deliberately set out to help undergraduates become more sophisticated and knowledgeable consumers of their own education.

I am not going to attempt to describe the outcomes of the Nebraska Project, there are people here who know far more than I about how it turned out. But I would like to talk briefly about the goals of the project.

In the project proposal, I attempted to address four problems related to students as consumers and institutions as providers of educational services. First, there is the task of helping students prepare for their role as lifelong learners by becoming more knowledgeable and analytical about their own learning styles and reactions to various instructional methods. Despite the fact that college students have had 12 years of experience as "consumers" of education, most remain remarkably unsophisticated about what constitutes a good learning experience for them, and most have given little thought to their own individualistic learning styles. They simply accept--or in some cases reject--what is set before them without attempting to exert influence or make choices. By this time we know that what is an effective learning experience for one person may be ineffective and even frustrating, for someone else (Cross, 1976). Some people get their best insights and inspiration through contemplation and independent study; others find their richest learning

experiences in interpersonal exchange. Some people prefer one method at one time in life or for some kinds of learning, but may opt for something else later on or with a different kind of learning problem. Thus one of the first objectives of the Nebraska project was to help students become more self-analytical--to observe themselves in action as learners. This objective was approached by designing a three-credit course entitled Learning Analysis, in which the goal was to give students some academic information about human learning in general and about their own learning styles in particular, to provide students with actual experience with different forms of instruction, and to help them analyze their reactions as learners.

The second lever for improved education stressed the responsibility of students for improving the teaching and learning process. I am a strong supporter of faculty development programs, but there is some danger that in the present enthusiasm for faculty development, students may become the passive observers of efforts to improve instruction, and they may come to consider themselves the lofty judges of the performance of teachers rather than critical judges of their own performance as learners. Thus the Nebraska project proposed that students be asked to rate learning rather than teaching, through devising Student Learning Scales with several rationales in mind. In the first place asking students to rate the effectiveness of their own learning presented a task at which they could be considered uniquely competent. Students are not always considered good judges of teaching by faculty, but if they are self-consciously aware of how and what they are learning, they should be considered competent evaluators of their own learning. The second rationale

for the Student Learning Scales was that asking students to observe learning rather than teaching keeps the emphasis where it should be, on the activity of learners rather than teachers. Third, the ultimate criterion of teaching effectiveness is student learning, and thus it makes sense to rate an educational experience by its impact on the learner.

A third lever for change in the Nebraska project consisted of establishing a laboratory for the demonstration of innovative teaching methods. A problem that plagues many projects on the improvement of teaching is that teaching is such a private affair in academe. There is little opportunity for faculty to observe the teaching of their colleagues, and the traditions of academe endorse the closed classroom door. The Nebraska project proposed an open-door demonstration laboratory which featured the best examples of a variety of teaching strategies taught by successful discipline-based faculty. The demonstration laboratory was the three-credit hour course in Learning Analysis. Faculty from anywhere on campus were encouraged to visit the class, to join in the learning activities, to observe their own reactions to the techniques, and to participate in the discussions of student reactions to various methods of instruction. Although few teachers seemed to take advantage of the opportunity--because they didn't know about it, weren't interested, or couldn't overcome the traditions of academe--I don't think that argues against the basic idea that analytical and non-threatening discussions among students and teachers about reactions to various teaching strategies should help teachers analyze the impact of various classroom procedures.

Finally, the Nebraska proposal called for better consumer information about courses available at the University. Virtually all college catalogues provide a brief description of the subject matter, hour, and instructor, and many colleges have made student ratings of the course and/or instructor public. Few catalogues, however, provide any information about how the course is taught. Yet Deana Finkler's (1979) evaluation of the Nebraska course in Learning Analysis showed that the method by which a learning unit was taught had more to do with the student's like or dislike of the unit than either the subject matter or the instructor. Moreover, there was great variability among students, and they were able to articulate well the reasons for their individual preferences regarding instructional strategies.

The how dimension of teaching and learning doesn't usually show up in college preferences because it is not a true variable, i.e., the lecture-discussion mode is so common that students on college campuses have little choice. But there are going to be many choices open to adult learners, and how a subject is taught will be an increasingly important variable in student choice.

In conclusion, I don't know how long we are going to persist in using the future tense when talking about the learning society. When an estimated 90 percent of American adults are engaged in self-planned learning projects each year (Tough, 1978), and one out of four are participating in organized instruction of some sort (Cross, 1979), it seems reasonable to suggest that the learning society is already here and growing. People may not have a lot of choice about whether they become lifelong learners, but they surely will have more choice than ever about what, when, how and where they do their learning.

I hope that all of us attending this conference will learn more about how to develop sophisticated consumers; how to provide them with the information they need, and how to match resources to needs.

NOTES:

1. I am indebted to Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Missions of the College Curriculum for the comparison between "then" and "now."

2. Personal communication from Robert Ruskin, editor, Journal of Personalized Instruction.

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