

FUTUREtakes

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Commentary

Comments/PFCs to Lois Neuman's fine article, "Learning Environment for the 21st Century," Spring 2005 issue:

There are three significant changes noted in her article – a mix of significantly different learning capabilities and delivery expectations, a transition from sage on the stage to guide on the side with power transfer to students, and apparently limitless compute and connect power. We have seen two of these before – for example the post World War II mix of older, more focused veteran and immature recent high school graduate applies to the first significant change. (However, attention span shortening, experiential learning, and the drive to multi-task are socially driven as well as generational. On the other hand, a friend believes that ADHD is not a disorder but an evolutionary change. If that is so, we may have to reach back to the rare, mixed fireside classes of Cro-Magnon and Neanderthal.) The European Middle Ages university system was more guide than sage on the stage initially – one might examine if the change came from who provided the funding for educators, distant parents or students who controlled their purses. Lastly, the transition from oral to written transmission of knowledge is similar to the transition to experiential transmission of learning. I suggest a few Points for Consideration which were not in the article:

1. Are there skills and knowledge that are best transferred to a student in a particular mode, irrespective of the student's learning preferences ?
2. What modes of instruction/curricula are in use in India and China (among others) that appear to prepare information technologists better than the "obsolete US high school" does?
3. How does the expert relate to the non-expert in a manner that keeps the non-expert from having to learn everything by doing rather than by listening or reading?
4. What are the apparent limits of human cognition and comprehension? The Army Research Lab did some work on this 20 years ago as did the USSR; perhaps it is time to see if the results hold for the millennials and the ADHD.
5. What should be changed in pre-college curricula, since 18 is too late to learn new modes?
6. How does one insure accuracy and evenhandedness / bias identification in on-line reference material which both student and faculty rely upon more and more?
7. How does one teach graduate students in the third world where digital dial tone is still a distant dream, as is POTS?

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