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Reply to Commentary by Tommy Osborne

(Summer 2005 issue)

Tommy Osborne's thought-provoking response to my article, "Learning Environment for the 21st Century" (Spring 2005 issue) raises some intriguing questions.

Osborne raises a question about the relationship between student learning preferences and acquisition of skills and knowledge. As a result of extensive research and experience in higher/adult education, the military, and business, skills are best taught by multiple methods that match the student's learning preferences, the student's ability, and the purpose and complexity of the skill.

In response to the question about the expert/non-expert teaching/learning relationship, the expert engages the non-expert or learner by applying multiple teaching/learning strategies such as reading, discussion, written assignments, debate, recitation, team work (interactive listening and discussion), simulation, gaming, e-textbooks, and interactive media that is multilinked, audio, and visual. At issue here is having astute experts, knowledgeable in a wide range of learning strategies, analyze the student's learning needs and match the strategy to the need.

The format for expert/non-expert interaction varies although blended learning is currently the format of choice requiring face-to-face time as well as electronic interaction. Given the nature of the global community, the necessity of the face-to-face component is under scrutiny. The elimination of face-to-face raises a plethora of questions related to integrity, honesty, ethics, plagiarism, interpersonal observation, and measurement or evaluation of learning. Secure electronic systems will solve some of the concern, but what is the trade-off for eliminating the face-to-face interaction between expert and non-expert?

Osborne suggests that the age of 18 is too late to learn new modes, but I believe it is never too late to learn. Perhaps the learning curve is steeper and the time longer with age, but we continue learning different behaviors as long as we live. Case in point, consider humans who lose anatomical functioning and adapt by learning new strategies to function and cope. Granted, we may get lazy and comfortable using old modes but if challenged, stimulated, rewarded, and required, we can learn new modes, especially for survival.

I welcome a reply from Tommy Osborne and invite you to join us in our dialogue.

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