



Continuing Education

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What Goes Around, Comes Around

The discussions about distance-learning quality, formats, and appropriate usage may seem new—but, in reality, they have been going on for a long, long time. In 1980, Mary Lindenstein Walshok asked questions about telecommunications and adult learning. She regarded the following as unanswered questions that “need to be grappled with in any meaningful discussion of the uses of mass media in continuing education” (or, for that matter, graduate education):

- Who are the most likely adult constituencies whose needs can be served by media?
- What content areas can most effectively be dealt with by media?
- What formats and production qualities are essential to successful adult programming?
- Who develops the instruction by media?
- Who pays for the instruction by media?
- Who certifies the instruction by media?
- What, if any, new alliances or partnerships between education, government, business, industry, and the professions are suggested by the expanding adult market and the increasing potential for instruction by media?¹

It is now sixteen years later, and these questions could have been formu-

lated yesterday. These questions highlight issues that are still with us, still under discussion, and still largely unresolved. In fact, each question is like a door that leads to another door, then another, and another . . . and behind each door lie other questions.

This column will address each of these questions and the attendant issues in sequence over the next several issues. If any reader wishes to express comments or, perhaps, develop an entire column on any of these questions/issues, please contact this column editor.

In this issue, we will begin with the first question: *Who are the most likely adult constituencies whose needs can be served by media?* This question immediately opens three additional doors: (1) media in the classroom; (2) broadcast media; and (3) interactive media at a distance. Each of these three approaches produces a host of issues, and the following comments are not intended to be all-inclusive. In fact, readers may wish to add further comments.

1. *Media in the classroom.* There will always be a continuum of media: older, but still usable, media; current new technologies; and soon-to-be-available technologies. An assortment of media exists that still provides good service: overhead transparencies, slides, films, audio-

cassettes, videocassettes, etc. Even the old opaque projector is still in use, and do not forget that print is still an important medium. There are good and sufficient reasons to continue to utilize these familiar media, not the least of which is economic: We already own the equipment; we are reasonably comfortable with its use; there is an element of portability in terms of the software that is appealing.

Today, there are new media immediately available (for a cost). The opaque projector has been superseded by a video camera/stand. Slides and overhead transparencies are giving way to the notebook computer and presentation software. Even films and video can be merged within computer presentations.

2. *Broadcast media.* Immediately television comes to mind, but radio continues to be a viable medium. Information is still transmitted via "stations" and "channels" in a broadcast mode, but this notion of "broadcast" itself is being beset by the third category: interactive media at a distance.
3. *Interactive media at a distance.* The comfortable living room television may become an individual's link to the entire spectrum of interactive information, including the Internet and the Web. Telephone companies are competing for this piece of the action as well. Computer interaction that presently enjoys the dominant position may soon give way to these new configurations, of which computers will most certainly be a part. The possibilities seem limited only by human imagination.

But the question remains: *Who are the most likely adult constituencies*

whose needs can be served by media? The simple answer is everyone, as information is transmitted by some sort of graphic record—whether that record be print or electronic. Of course, there is a learning curve that accompanies each new type of media, but that is to be expected in a world of change. For many, the issue will be the various types of cost: cost of purchase and cost of engaging in the learning curve. These are the "downside" costs that, for many people, are not really negative.

The positive "costs" include the cost involved in addressing learning styles, where individual differences can be linked to appropriate media; the cost relating to convenience, where the customer/student can learn at his or her own rate and time; and the cost of access, which enables customers/students to engage in learning through distance media and opportunities that might otherwise be unavailable.

Therefore, whether students are inside the classroom or at a distance, student learning styles are important considerations. But where distance and time are factors, convenience and access become dominant issues. As the expectations of users escalate because of new technological developments, the types and numbers of people whose needs can be served by media will correspondingly increase. It is an exciting time to be in education—it is even more exciting to be in library and information studies as the field undergoes significant transformation. Media form part of this new scenario and, in many ways, are the heart of the entire paradigm shift.

The next Continuing Education column will be on IFLA. Volume 38, No. 2 will return to this topic focusing on the second question. Comments are most welcome.

References

1. Mary Lindenstone Walshok, "Summary: Some Unanswered Questions about Telecommunications and Adult Learning," in *Providing Continuing Education by Media and Technology: New Directions for Continuing Education* 5, ed. Martin N. Chamberlain (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980), 99--100.

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