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The "Old" and "New" Story

A "paradigm shift" is taking place in American instruction: trainers are embracing models of instruction that are radically different from traditional educational approaches. Instructor-centered teaching methods—instructional techniques which focus on the performance of instructors: what they say and what they do—are giving way to active student-centered teaching and learning methods—instructional techniques which focus on the performance of learners: what they learn



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and how they learn it. Learning outcomes have become the measuring rod for quality instruction.

In the more traditional approach—the "old story"—the act of instruction was central. When instruction is the focus, the instructor is an actor on an instructional stage, and the students, as a class, are a passive audience. But with the shifting models of instruction—the "new story"—the act of learning, measured by tangible performance, is placed squarely on the shoulders of actively engaged learners. When learning is the focus, the learner is the actor, and the role of the teacher



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changes. Instructors are not eliminated in the new models, rather instructors cease to be the only source of information and now become coaches, managers, and consultants of the multiple learning resources made available to learners. In short, instructors become guides and assistants, facilitating active student discovery and learning.

Curriculum Goals

When the focus of education is on the instructor and the act of instruction, curriculum goals are established and regularly revisited to guide performance of



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instructional staff. At regular intervals, instructors have "staff planning meetings" in which they "reword" last year's goal statements with minimal proposals for innovation. Instructional inertia leads instructors to "do it the same way" again and again. Course content, learner assignments, tools of evaluation remain static year after year. Instructors—at the end of the training cycle—evaluate themselves by the same old objectives and come out looking pretty good. Instruction has genuinely occurred, but has any learning occurred?



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The emphasis changes dramatically when the focus is placed on actively engaging students' minds in the act of learning. Rather than setting curriculum goals around the instructor's performance, the goals shift to measurable statements of learner outcomes. Rather than promising that an instructor will do thus-and-so to cover this much material by such-and-such a date, the new curriculum goals state what the learner will be able to do and know upon completing the course (and how this learning will be measured). These learning goals serve as a guide for both the learner's activities and the instructor's supporting role.



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Leaner Assignments

In traditional instruction, a class of students is given study assignments for completion either in school or at home. All of these assignments are predefined by the instructor; due-dates are clearly stated up front. Little if any flexibility is built into these one-dimensional student tasks. Everyone is required to do the same thing, regardless of differing levels of ability or interest. Evaluation of student performance reflects this one-dimensionality: instructors grade the assignments by looking for single, "correct" answers.



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In the new instructional paradigm, learners are involved in directing their own learning, selecting their own learning tasks, and evaluating their own progress. The instructor provides a variety of learning experiences—each carefully crafted to meet clearly stated learning objectives—from which the learner chooses a task. Individual interest is raised; such choice is self-motivating. The learner who "buys into" the learning experience is much more likely to go beyond the minimum effort required for minimal success.



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Information Sources

In traditional instruction, students receive information from two sources: classroom lectures and textbook readings. These are the main (and often only) sources of information and instruction. Quite often these sources provide dated information which does not reflect the changing realities of the "real" world.

If a student is an auditory learner (learns by hearing a lecture) or a text-based learner (learns by reading printed text), then these methods are successful. But for learners with different styles of learning



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—for example, visual learners who quickly comprehend a graphical representation of information, such as a chart or a map, or tactile learners who need "hands-on" experience to best grasp information—traditional information sources fall short.

Newer instructional models call for alternative resources (online databases, tutorials, simulations) which are selected by students on the basis of needs, interests, and learning styles. The role of the instructor changes to that of gatherer of information resources and facilitator of their use. Instructors become "guides in discovery," structuring the learner's



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experience as he/she works with these large knowledge bases of information.

Presentation Modes

In traditional instructional models, subject matter is presented in a single mode, usually classroom lecture. A group of students passively sits and listens to the instructor. Members of a class undergo the same experiences both qualitatively and quantitatively.

In the newer instructional models, different learning situations are provided: self-directed learning, peer tutoring, computer-



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assisted instruction, and self-paced tutorials as well as the more traditional classroom lecture and textbook study. Learners become involved directly and intensely in the learning process. Instructors become caregivers and managers. Learners are provided with a variety of learning experiences. Time and quality of learning varies among the students.

Learning Evaluation

In the traditional instructional paradigm, instructors measure the progress of the learners, usually with a prearranged



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schedule of tests. The teacher rewards and admonishes the students. Testing and evaluation are one-dimensional, reflecting on the interests and experiences of the instructor. Likewise, this type of testing tends to reflect the learning style of the instructor: if an instructor is a text-based learner, exams will probably require text-based reading comprehension for successful completion. Students with different learning styles are clearly disadvantaged.

In the newer learning models, the evaluation of learning is accomplished by self- or peer-review (under the teacher's



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guide) at the time of mastery of learning tasks. The total work environment (both in-class and in-lab settings) is motivating and engaging for students. Traditional testing remains important, but it ceases to be the sole means of evaluation.

Technology Impact

Only with the intensive use of technology is a shift in the learner experience model possible. While technology is only one small component of the larger educational process, access to more and different learning resources is the foundation for curriculum reform. Computer-driven



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technologies—devices of mass-storage such as academic networks or CD-ROMs and means of remotely accessing information (telecommunications, the Internet, online search services)—are central for the move toward learner-driven, learner-directed learning.

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