

Opportunities and Opportunity Cost in Preparing Millennium Teachers

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The millennium teacher is presented with two powerful conceptions. One is expressed in Pogo's observation that "...we always seem to be confronted with insurmountable opportunity." The other is presented best in T.S. Eliot's poem, "Choruses To The Rock."

- Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
- Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Both of these conceptions have direct implications for teacher educators and their work with the next generation of teachers.

"Insurmountable opportunity" is the reality for teachers who have not developed the ability to make "enlightened choices." Enlightened decision making in a sea of opportunity requires the foundational understanding that information, knowledge, and wisdom represent different ways of knowing. Information is one dimensional. It is linear or horizontal, fragmented, and quite useless in and of itself. Knowledge is structured information; it shows relationships between and among bits of information. Knowledge is best represented by theories about natural and social phenomena; it is created basically within content areas, and it tends to be field-specific. Wisdom is the organic application of information and knowledge to human dilemmas, desires, and dreams. Wisdom is that quality of thought and imagination that ties us to our cultural heritage and gives us the ability to find and build the moral framework upon which human life is defined and within which meaning resides.

It is critical to have preservice teachers involved with all three ways of knowing, so that information

can be tempered with wisdom as well as with knowledge. This involvement, however, is a function of how well learners understand and practice enlightened decision making. This is particularly important today, since we have reached a point in history when technology can actually perform the human function of organizing and passing on information, and in some cases, creating knowledge. Information, particularly in an information age such as ours, is by definition, everywhere abundant. Knowledge and wisdom, on the other hand, are not only scarce, but seem to be fading from importance. Yet, the latter two ways of knowing are necessary if information is to be used in helping to make the human condition better. This is the central issue and the central function in our relationship with technology.

Teacher education programs must change their present content emphases and spending patterns that place the majority of their resources on providing their students with information. Teaching information is easier, of course, than teaching knowledge and wisdom. Information is also easier to test. But, we also know that the teaching of knowledge and wisdom can be more meaningful, because it calls for more complex understandings of the contextual nature of technology and attending pedagogical priorities.

The pedagogical priority of teacher educators should be to engage technological advances such as distributed learning environments, those that combine the use of face-to-face teaching with synchronous and asynchronous mediated interaction, for fostering the teaching of knowledge and wisdom. But even here, a real danger exists in that distributed learning environments will be used to strengthen emphases on the learning of information, rather than as a medium for developing knowledge and wisdom in the next generation of teachers.

This issue of medium or context is of primary importance. It helps us to remember that the larger mission of the teacher educator is to orient his or her work toward creating the pedagogical discipline necessary to extend to the next generation of citizens those humane and civic arts essential to the existence and improvement of a free society. And to do so with sufficient grace and high purpose, such that all citizens will have access to the power of a cultivated intellect.

KEY TERMS

Knowledge: Structured information that shows relationships between and among bits of informa-

tion. It tends to be field specific; that is, it is created within or between content fields.

Opportunity Cost: The cost of the next best alternative use of time or resources when one choice is made rather than another. The cost of doing something always includes the additional cost of what could have been done if a different choice was made.

Wisdom: The organic application of information and knowledge to human dilemmas and desires. Wisdom is a quality of thought that ties us to the cultural heritage and gives us the ability to find and build the moral framework upon which human life is defined and within which meaning resides.

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