Appendix H

Ways of Learning: Reactive Versus Proactive *

For some time now I have been aware of the fact that the products of our educational system don't know how to learn—they only know how to be taught.

Recently, as I was reflecting on this sad state of affairs, it dawned on me that a more accurate way of conceptualizing this phenomenon was reactive versus proactive learning. For traditional pedagogy conditions the student to respond to the teacher's stimuli; the initiative in the transaction is almost wholly in the teacher; the role of the student is to react.

Obviously, some learning results from being taught this way, but it keeps the learner in a dependent role and limits the learning to the boundaries set by the teacher. It is poor preparation for continuing to learn throughout a lifetime, which is what we are about in adult education.

And so in adult education and training, it seems to me, we have an obligation to help our students learn other—proactive—ways of learning. For in adult life, learning will take place for the most part only if the learner takes the initiative; teachers are not as omnipresent.

In Table H-1 on the following page I have made a beginning in identifying the difference in the skills required by the student in engaging in these two ways of learning. I invite the *Journal's* readers to join with me in elaborating on the skills of learning that we ought to be helping our students develop.

Table H-1
Ways of Learning

Resources for learning	Required conditions	Required skills
Reactive Teacher in traditional course	Willingness to be dependent. Respect for authority. Commitment to learning as means to an end (e.g., degree). Competitive relationship with fellow students. (The way most of us were taught to learn—not recommended)	Ability to listen uncritically. Ability to retain information. Ability to take notes. Ability to predict exam questions.
Proactive Printed materials (and experts)	Intellectual curiosity. Spirit of inquiry. Knowledge of resources available. Healthy skepticism toward authority. Criteria for testing reliability and validity. Commitment to learning as a developmental process.	Ability to formulate questions answerable by data. Ability to identify data available in printed materials (e.g., by Table of Contents, Index, etc.). Ability to scan quickly. Ability to test data against criteria of reliability and validity. Ability to analyze data to produce answers to questions.
Resource people (supervisors, experts)	Institutional commitment to individual growth as capital investment. Definition of role of supervisor as including "resource for learning." Time availability by both supervisor and employee for conferences. Inclusion of both supervisor's and employee's learning accomplishments in reward system. Spirit of mutual assistance in growth and development.	By Supervisor: Ability to convey respect, caring, and support. Ability to provide data (and feedback) objectively and nonthreateningly. Ability to ask probing questions while keeping locus of responsibility in employee. Ability to use employees as resource for his own learning. Ability to listen empathically.
		By Employee: Ability to formulate goals. Ability to assess present level of performance. Ability to collect and analyze data about performance nondefensively. Ability to relate to supervisor as a resource for learning. Ability to be open and honest with supervisor.
On-the-job and life experiences	Collaborative relationships with colleagues. Commitment to learning as a developmental process. Institutional support for learning from mistakes. High valuation of self-direction.	Ability to collect data through: (1) own observation, (2) feedback from supervisors, peers, and subordinates, (3) analysis of records. Ability to use data for self-diagnosis of needs for self-improvement. Ability to accept responsibility for own learning. Ability to experiment with new behavior.