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Abstract
While the now-clichéd shift from 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side' that characterizes the changing role of teachers is a good start, it is just that – a start. In this paper, I argue for a detailed look at the concomitant shift in the role of students, as they leave the world of passive recipients and join the ranks of active participants in the teaching-learning nexus. The paper discusses the problematic conflation of the terms 'information' and 'knowledge' that surfaces in consideration of the shifting roles of teachers and students, and argues that, in addition to defining information and knowledge precisely, we must consider the significance of the processes that transform the former *into* the latter. And finally, I reiterate the importance of making these distinctions and defining these processes not in the abstract but, rather, in the context of the various disciplines.

Keywords
Teacher's role, student's role, learning, information, knowledge, disciplines

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Introduction

It is now a well-worn cliché that the role of the teacher has changed in a significant and positive way: no longer a 'sage on the stage', the teacher now functions as more of a 'guide on the side'.[i] This change in function is embedded within the more general shift from what might be termed a 'teacher-centered' model of education to a 'student-centered' model (or, even better, and for reasons outlined below, a 'learning-centered' model). While few would argue against the logic behind this shift, it is important to note that this functional change may well be a necessary first step in the improvement of our educational system, but on its own, the shift is insufficient in accomplishing a pedagogical makeover. The teacher's functional shift from sage on the stage to guide on the side triggers at least two important and highly interconnected corollaries: first, the concomitant change in the *student's* role, responsibilities, and obligations; and, second, the necessary refinement of the distinctions between 'information' and 'knowledge' and especially the changes in the transformative processes between the two. Before amplifying these two corollaries, however, let us begin by examining the context for the shift, that from which it was felt a shift was necessary in the first place.

As indicated at the outset, the sage-on-the-stage characterization of the teacher's role is synonymous with a teacher-centered approach to education, in which the standard lecture is considered to be the principal mode of delivery. And *delivery* is in a very real sense precisely what most lectures serve to do: deliver content from the one who knows to those who do not know. (For now, I am using the more generic term 'content' and avoiding the terms 'information' and 'knowledge' deliberately.) Historically, when those 'in the know' were small in number and access to factual content extremely limited, the delivery or transmission of content was a necessary process, arguably a positive end in itself. Although I will return to the utility of the lecture later, suffice it to say here that the lecture –

content delivery by a learned sage via a one-way transmission mode – may well not be needed anymore as a means of delivering or transmitting content, the latter now readily and abundantly available virtually anywhere and anytime via technology (even if that broad accessibility has come with its own list of problems, not the least of which is the question of accuracy). Rather, the sage is now free to stand aside, indeed is encouraged to do so, and adopt more of a 'guiding' or 'facilitating' function.

From 'Sage and Recipient' to 'Guide and Participant'

Now we enter the realm of the first of the two interrelated corollaries of this shift in the teacher's role. To repeat: the corollary of the shift in the *teacher's* role. As noted at the outset, even if this shift is considered to be a positive and necessary step, it references the change in role of only *one* of the two partners in the teaching-learning relationship. After all, the sage-on-the-stage characterization of the teacher has a corresponding characterization of the student: call it what you will – a passive note-taker, a receiver of content, an accumulator of factoids. And, of course, this apparent passivity on the part of students is one of the acknowledged problems with the sage-on-the-stage/lecture format. All the more reason, then, that it is important when celebrating the clichéd shift of the teacher's role, we include at least some discussion of the concomitant shift in the role of the *student*.

The 'before' picture is clear: we have the 'teacher-sage' paired with the 'student-content-receiver'. But in the new-and-improved 'after' image, what exactly is the 'teacher-guide' paired with? A shift in one surely necessitates a shift in the other and unpacking the new responsibilities and practices of one necessitates at least some suggestion as to the new responsibilities and expected practices of the other. My point here is not to imply that the responsibilities and practices of the teacher-as-guide are greatly minimized, or are of secondary import now that the shift has taken place, for that shift both requires and facilitates numerous new and creative activities on the part of the teacher. Rather, my point is that the role and

responsibilities of *students* also need to be re-examined and clearly articulated, particularly now that those responsibilities are considerably more varied and self-directed than those required simply to receive content passively from a teacher-delivered lecture.

Those who place education's problems squarely on teachers, urging them to move beyond their outdated, wordy, preachy – I've heard 'high-falutin' – lectures to adopt the role of a guide, need to be reminded that this shift in and of itself will not solve the problems, which are just as often a failure of students to assume the responsibility to learn deeply. In what follows, it will become clear what I mean by learning 'deeply', but for now I will couple the teacher's shift from 'sage to guide' with the corresponding student shift from 'recipient to participant'. Although somewhat clumsy, the phrase 'sage-and-recipient-to-guide-and-participant' is an important reminder that teaching and learning involve a dynamic interaction between *two* partners; it is a reminder that, as the title of this paper suggests, the sage-to-guide shift is only the start, only half of the equation as it were. (In fact, I will suggest later that it is *less* than half, and that the equation actually consists of *three* partners, not two.) For ease, I will hereafter refer to the two-dimensional and interconnected sage-and-recipient-to-guide-and-participant shift as the 'SaR2GaP' shift.

There are many good examples of new opportunities and responsibilities students are afforded when they become active partners in the teaching-learning process and become more fully engaged as participants rather then merely information recipients.[ii] Most of the so-called 'high-impact practices' now gaining currency in post-secondary education – practices such as community service learning courses, undergraduate research, flipped classrooms, problem-based education, to name a few – are well documented and so I will not rehearse them in detail here.[iii] Rather, it is on the second, interconnected corollary flowing from the SaR2GaP shift, a shift that both facilitates and requires the aforementioned new modes of student engagement and participation, which I will elaborate. Recall that this second corollary concerns the distinctions between information and knowledge as well as the relationship of each to the processes of

teaching and learning, *before* the shift as well as *after*. As I will demonstrate, the terms 'information' and 'knowledge' are among the most conflated terms in our discourse on education and, so, unpacking the two terms will help to demonstrate, first of all, that they *are* in fact distinct and, then, that they relate to each other in particular ways and that each relates in specific ways to the activities of teachers (as both sages *and* as guides) and to those of students (as both recipients *and* as participants).

Distinctions Between Information and Knowledge

Education may be understood to be *about* many things, but one thing is certain: it is fundamentally about the pursuit of knowledge – its creation, its contextualization, and its application. And although information and knowledge are inextricably tied, as will be discussed, information in itself, however abundant and accessible, is not necessarily knowledge, at least not in any meaningful sense implicit in the educational goal of 'pursuing knowledge'. Possessing factual information, or what is often termed 'declarative knowledge', essentially means knowing *that* such and such is the case. I situate declarative knowledge more towards the *information* end of the spectrum because it is largely about information *retrieval* and *memorization* – processes necessary for deep learning and knowledge creation but, on their own, are neither evidence of deep learning nor examples of knowledge creation. Consequently, hereafter I will refer to declarative knowledge simply as 'information'.

When we speak of education being 'about the pursuit of knowledge', then, we mean knowledge of a different type, knowledge that, at the very least consists of information or declarative knowledge that is subsequently 'acted upon' in some manner or another. Consider Neil Postman's definition of knowledge as:

> organized information – information that is embedded in some context; information that has a purpose, that leads one to seek further information in order to understand something about the world. . . . When one has knowledge,

> one knows how to make sense of information, knows how to relate information to one's life, and, especially, knows when information is irrelevant. (1999, p. 93)

The notions of 'contextualizing' information, leading one 'to seek' further information, knowing how to 'make sense' of information, and how to 'relate' that information – these are good examples of what I mean by 'acting upon' information. Raw, acquired, memorized information is merely the gateway to processes that generate meaningful knowledge for those acting upon that data.

This type of knowledge – knowledge that requires more than mere information retrieval and memorization – is often referred to as 'procedural' or 'operative' knowledge. Matthew Lipman (2003) suggests that: "the focus of the educational process is not on the acquisition of information but on the grasp of relationships within and among the subject matters under investigation" (pp. 18-19). And further reinforcing the distinction between declarative and procedural/operative knowledge, he asserts that:

> Declarative knowledge consists of facts; operative knowledge involves understanding where the declarative knowledge comes from and what underlies it. Operative knowledge also involves the 'capacity to use, apply, transform or recognize the relevance of declarative knowledge in new situations'. (1991, p. 140)

Once again we see that the kind of knowledge relevant to deep learning involves acting upon received or retrieved information, whether by applying it, transforming it, or seeking to understand its relevance in new situations. Hereafter, the term knowledge refers to procedural/operational knowledge.

I must reiterate that by insisting on a clear distinction between information and knowledge, I am in no way ignoring the important role of information acquisition – even memorization – in the learning process. It is not as if we can bypass the information-acquisition stage and simply opt for knowledge as a richer, more robust starting point. I *am*, however, suggesting that information retrieval is only the first step in the learning

process by which we utilize information – work with it, interrogate it – to create knowledge and gain understanding *for ourselves*.[iv] Moreover, deep learning not only involves information *and* knowledge, but more importantly, it involves the *transformation* of information *into* knowledge, and it is those transformational processes that must be the focus of teacher-student interactions and students' own self-directed paths of discovery.

And here I want to raise a flag concerning technology as it relates to the notion of transforming information into knowledge. As suggested above, knowledge creation starts with information, ideally accurate information, and technology certainly has made information plentiful and readily available. But as Neil Postman (1999) quips,

> [T]o say that we live in an unprecedented age of information is merely to say that we have available more statements about the world than we have ever had. This means, among other things, that we have available more erroneous statements than we have ever had. (pp. 90-92)

One of the problems, then, is that there is so much information available to us that sorting it, assessing it for accuracy, and especially deciding which of the seemingly endless possible sources to assemble for later scrutiny, can take an enormous amount of time. While some would argue that these are the very processes that define learning and knowledge creation and therefore *should* be undertaken by students, I suggest that these are still only preparatory, information-gathering, stages to the process of deep learning. Moreover, these information-gathering preparatory stages may overwhelm the deep learning process to the point that the retrieval and sorting processes are themselves accepted as bona fide examples of learning and meaningful knowledge construction, that they are considered educational *ends*, not *means*. In an odd sense, we are back to the problem originally cited in connection with the lecture-delivery format – that retrieval and regurgitation of information, in this case made abundantly, if randomly, available via technology rather than the lecturer, are accepted as evidence of learning. Technology has

given us great opportunities to mine huge amounts of information; thus, the term is *information* technology not *knowledge* technology, and for good reason.

Now, in an attempt to link the two corollaries of what I've called the SaR2GaP shift, let us explore the distinctions and relationships between information and knowledge as they apply to teachers in their capacities both as sages and guides and to students in their roles as receivers and participants, all with a view to contextualizing the aforementioned processes of transforming information into knowledge.

Transforming Information into Knowledge

One of the most frequently stated criticisms of the sage-on-the-stage approach to education, and particularly of the lecture-mode of delivery so clearly associated with that approach, is that knowledge flows in one direction only, from the teacher to the passive student. Matthew Lipman (2003) notes, for instance, that among the dominating assumptions of the standard model of educational practice is that "[E]ducation consists in the transmission of *knowledge* from those who know to those who don't know" (p. 18, emphasis mine). And Ian Angus (2009) suggests as much when he notes that ". . . education has degenerated toward the simple 'transmission of *knowledge*'" (p. 82, emphasis mine). However, in light of the distinctions rehearsed above, I would suggest that this is *not* what happens in educational practice. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it *could not* happen. While it is true that there is, problematically, a unidirectional flow, with the passive student at the receiving end, what is *flowing*, metaphorically speaking, is not knowledge at all – again, not the rich procedural/operational knowledge that defines deep learning – but, rather mere *information*, or at best, declarative knowledge. Actually, it's even more complicated than that, because that which flows is, or had better be, knowledge *for the teacher* but, as simply received, is merely information *to the student*. Let me explain this distinction.

The processes of working intently and intentionally with information to create knowledge – the curiosity-driven discovery; the analysis, reflection, and synthesis of information; the grappling with contradictions and the weighing of arguments – all of these knowledge-generating processes and activities have necessarily been undertaken by teachers; *they* are the ones who have worked and reworked mountains of information, transforming that information into synthesized knowledge *for themselves*. Merely dictating their hard-won knowledge to students yields only information by the time passive receivers transcribe that content. That is, the passive-reception process undertaken by students is not the critical-creative information-to-knowledge transformation that teachers went through but, rather, the *reverse* – a kind of *knowledge-to-information simplification and de-contextualization*! What we want, of course, is for students to participate in *their own* information-to-knowledge transformative processes, obviously not processes that are as complex and broadly based as those undertaken by seasoned scholars, but transformative processes nonetheless. So, although passivity on the part of students and the limitation of student activity to simple reception, memorization, and regurgitation *are* serious issues, there is a categorical misunderstanding of what it is that students are passive *about*, what it is that they are receiving in a lecture: what they are passive *about* and what they are receiving is simply information. And *that* is the problem.

Now, as alluded to at the outset, it should be easy to see that merely having the sage step aside and assume the role of a guide does not necessarily, much less automatically, correct this information-knowledge conflation. What that shift *does* do, however, is point back to the first corollary – the issue of the *student's* new role, now that the sage is not there to present in the best-case scenario, impeccably researched, finely argued, and clearly organized information for students to use as raw materials in their own pursuit of knowledge and understanding. In their new role as guides-on-the-side, teachers are better able to share responsibility for the learning process with their students as they adopt *their* new role, which requires them to actively participate in the very processes of curiosity-driven

analysis, reflection, synthesis, and discovery that scholars routinely go through. So, while it may be true that the definitions of and distinctions between the concepts of information and knowledge are no different in the post-shift scenario (that is, once teachers function as guides and the students as participants), the seat of responsibility for transforming information into knowledge and the processes by which that occurs most certainly *are* different.

In light of the SaR2GaP shift, then, it behooves teachers to facilitate the various information-to-knowledge transformational processes for students, to make space for those transformations to happen and to guide students in those pursuits[v]; but that shift also underscores the fact that education is not about the accumulation and regurgitation of passively received information, and so *the responsibility for actually engaging in processes of information-knowledge transformation lies squarely with the students*. The need for students to keep up their end of the bargain in this transaction is crucial. One is reminded of the quip: "be careful what you wish for." While students may want, and indeed should have, a greater level of participation in and control over their own learning processes, that new level of participation requires considerably more investment (read: effort) on their part.

Balancing Three Partners, Not Two: Enter 'The Disciplines'

There is a bit of a catch-22 here: a teacher, in preparing a finely-honed lecture, has already gone through the time-consuming processes of information retrieval, analysis, sorting, and evaluation, thereby eliminating the need for students to waste endless hours surfing questionable information to tease out the accurate and the useful. And yet, analysis, sorting, evaluating were said to be among the very kinds of things students need to be doing for themselves. Clearly, it is a question of balance: encouraging students to engage meaningfully and effectively in those processes themselves, but guiding them in ways that discourage random, unfocused searches for information that are sure to overwhelm them to the point that the really creative processes of discovery, reflection,

synthesis, within a carefully circumscribed body of information become impossible or at least highly unlikely. In this sense – and here is why my earlier language with respect to moving beyond the lecture was somewhat cautionary – maybe we need to be careful not to enter into a strict *either-or* scenario. Perhaps the SaR2GaP shift should be recast into a *both-and* composite, a kind of spectrum that allows for a flexible, constantly and contextually shifting balance between the sage-and-recipient and the guide-and-participant.

Once again, however, the situation is even more complex, this time, for two related reasons. First, not only is education not a tug-of-war between a teacher-centered model and a student-centered one, it is not even (or only) a flexible and constantly shifting of balance between the two, as I just suggested as the best of those two options. In fact, as I will suggest below, there really are *three* partners in the educational mission. And second, I have been speaking of information and knowledge as if there were one and only one clear definition of each when, in fact, what counts as information and knowledge in one context may be and often is vastly different in another. These related elements of complexity reveal the role of *the disciplines* as a vital third partner in the educational mission. And to be clear, it is not that the processes themselves need to be or even could be the same in all of their detail and across all disciplines and learning contexts; rather, it is simply important that *some form of transformation* from raw information into useable and meaningful knowledge take place, and take place for and by the students themselves in a disciplinary or even inter-disciplinary context.

Education is not about pumping up the ego of the wise old sage on the stage, around which everything and everyone else is said to revolve. And it is dangerous to linger too long on the notion that the student is at the centre of education, as this raises all kinds of narcissistic nuances that I will not go into at this point. A *learning*-centered model is a better characterization for any number of reasons, not the least of which is that both teachers *and* students are learners, both constituencies transform information into knowledge and, arguably, motivations and strategies for those transformational processes flow in both

directions. But beyond that, if we are learning, we are learning in the context of a particular discipline, or perhaps even more than one. So it is important in weighing the benefits of the different roles that teachers and students might play in the learning process that we think of the disciplines as a third partner in the conversation, perhaps even as the foundational element that ties teacher and student together. This, of course, is not a new idea. Already fifteen years ago Parker Palmer (1998, 2007) introduced this idea with passion and eloquence, suggesting that "the classroom should be neither teacher-centered nor student-centered but subject-centered" and that "we must put a *third thing*, a great thing [the subject] at the center of the pedagogical circle" (2007, p. 119, emphasis in original). All I've added here is the reminder that, in light of the variety of disciplines in which education takes place, information-to-knowledge transformational processes must not only take place, but must do so within the parameters for knowledge generation *particular to those subject areas*.

The disciplines themselves – their history, development, and evolution; the problems and contradictions they raise; the opportunities, indeed responsibilities, they generate for consideration of contemporary contextualization – all of this should be the source of students' enthusiasm and curiosity. If teachers, either as sages *or* guides, demonstrate genuine and infectious enthusiasm and passion about the discipline, as indeed they should, it is, again, not so much the sages or guides that influence the students but the discipline itself about which they are so passionate and in which they invite their students to become deeply engaged. Once again we can turn to Palmer (2007) for insight: "Passion for the subject propels [the] subject, not the teacher, into the center of the learning circle – and when a great thing is in their midst, students have direct access to the energy of learning and of life" (p. 122). A given discipline, subject area, Palmer's *third great thing*, is a common thread through all of our activities as teachers and learners – as lecturers, guides, recipients, and participants – but our individual relationships to that third great thing change depending on our role at any given time.

In the conversation about teachers' roles as sages and guides and students' roles as recipients or participants, it is also easy to ignore education – comprised of interrelated activities of teaching, learning, discovering, and so forth – as that which is, in part at least, responsible for preserving and protecting the integrity of the disciplines, adding to our individual and collective understanding of those bodies of knowledge as well as adding to the bodies of knowledge themselves. In this sense, teachers and students play an important role *beyond* that of sage, guide, recipient, and participant; both parties also take on a crucial 'curatorial' role within, and for the purpose of preserving the integrity of, their disciplines.

Conclusion

It all started simply enough, or so it seemed. What could be more emancipating – for teachers, students, and for education overall – than replacing the seemingly anachronistic lecture, the talking head, with an environment filled with guides and participants? Like most, I see this shift in a positive light, though as mentioned, I do not support the notion of leaving the lecture format behind entirely. My goals above were modest and perhaps the messages embedded in those goals were too obvious to have spent so much time outlining them. But it seems to me that any discussion of the changing role of the teacher absolutely must be accompanied by a robust analysis of how the student's role changes. I hope to have at least contributed to that conversation.

Moreover, tied to the concept of learning are the twin pillars of information and knowledge, a pair of terms I see as being frequently conflated, often with negative consequences. In addition to the conflation of terms, however, it is the processes of transformation from information to knowledge that I see as being misplaced at best or ignored at worst. Clearly, with a shift in roles of teacher and student, both parties, not just the teachers, must be actively engaged in such transformational processes. And finally, the concepts of information and knowledge themselves are highly dependent upon and unique to the various disciplines; even more acutely tied to the disciplines

are the processes by which we transform information into knowledge. And so, the disciplines themselves must be considered as part of the complex matrix that we call education, part of the conversation in which we engage in the name of deep learning.

I do not for a moment imagine that there is anything earth shattering in what I have offered here, but I do believe we need to keep these and other matters front and centre as we continue the ongoing transformation of education. The interrelatedness of education's many and varied facets calls us to be aware of and sensitive to the ripple effect of any single change we might make. The very processes we undertake as scholars in our own particular disciplines – discovery motivated by curiosity, analysis prompted by contradiction, synthesis necessitated by multiple theories and seemingly endless sources – these same processes need to be brought to bear when we seek to fine-tune our twin-pronged meta-discipline of teaching-and-learning.

Endnotes

[i] This phrase was first coined in Alison King (1999).

[ii] Elsewhere I have expanded on the various opportunities available to, and especially responsibilities required of, students as they develop as scholars and professionals in their chosen fields. See Charles Morrison (2012).
There are other sources addressing students' particular roles in an educational environment that has moved beyond the standard lecture format. See, for example, Maryellen Weimer (2002), especially chapter 5.

[iii] See, for example, Jayne E. Brownell, J. E. and Swaner, L. E. (2010).

[iv] It is important to note that creating knowledge for oneself out of received information is not the same thing as, nor does it require, the creation of knowledge that is new to the discipline;

the process must at least yield knowledge that is new and meaningful to the one transforming the information.

[v]Again, I refer the reader to Charles Morrison (2012), which considers contexts in which faculty may facilitate more engaged, responsible, and scholarly forms of participation from their students.

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