You certainly can’t always look at things from someone else’s point of view. For instance, from here, that looks like a bucket of water...but from an ant’s point of view, it’s a vast ocean, from an elephant’s, just a cool drink, and to a fish, of course, it’s home. So you see, the way you see things depends a great deal on where you look at them from. (Juster, 1962)

Introduction

Candy (1991) deduces from the literature that there is a qualitative difference between learner-control and autodidaxy. Learner-control is “concerned with the devolution by educators, and acceptance by learners, of responsibility for valued instructional functions within recognisable teaching/learning situations” (p. 127), which is clearly the tradition in which this book lies. Autodidaxy, on the other hand, is concerned with “learning projects that people undertake on their own initiative, without any formal institutional structures or support” (ibid). Autodidacts select the goals, the methods and the resources themselves. For Candy, this makes the two issues quite distinct. This chapter provides an alternative view, suggesting that both lie on the same continuum and that the apparent differences are not matters of kind, but matters of scale.
This chapter is concerned with choosing an appropriate scale for looking at educational transactions and, particularly, the points where learning trajectories may change. It will be seen that perspective makes a great deal of difference to how a transaction or series of transactions is modelled, and that scale operates at a number of levels including the spatial, the temporal, and the conceptual. The intention is to reach a point that will enable the identification of what kind of choices in a learning trajectory are significant and what are not, and at what scales. These crucial finishing touches to the theory of transactional control enable the theory to shed light on teaching and learning practices and, perhaps, to generate new ideas and approaches.

**Choice and Scale**

Transactional control has been defined as relating to the choices of tasks or activities that are intended to bring about learning. Earlier chapters have shown how such choices are subject to constraint, but which of the myriad of choices that might be considered to affect a learning trajectory are significant has yet to be determined. Some choices are big (“Should I commit to a four-year degree?”) and some are small (“Should I read the next word of this sentence?”). If all choices were significant and consciously made, then we would be drowned under a sea of endless possibilities. We would, perhaps, be unable to make any choices at all. Therefore, it is important to discover the appropriate scale at which significant learning choices may be made.

**Smaller Choices are Usually More Deterministic**

A general feature of the small choices is that they have a tendency to be more deterministic and constrained than the big ones. For example (although other choices are frequently made), in general, little consideration is given to the choice about whether to skip to the next word of a sentence. Slightly more consideration is given to the choice about moving from one sentence to the next, more still for a paragraph, a chapter, a section, volume, a book. Perhaps it would be more accurate to talk of conscious or intentional choices in this respect—it may be that unconscious or habitual choices are made at every scale, but they are not significant efforts to engage in a distinct learning trajectory, nor even, in any meaningful sense, a part of one. Although there is no *a priori* reason why the same degree of autonomy may be exercised at every level of scale, life would quickly become unbearably complex were people to do so. We avoid making too many choices, perhaps because each represents a certain quantum of work and it would be exhausting and emotionally draining to treat every minute movement or even thought as something requiring conscious choice.
Shushes in the Parlor: Reclaiming the “Conversation” Metaphor
Erik Ellis (2012). Disrupting Pedagogies in the Knowledge Society: Countering Conservative Norms with Creative Approaches (pp. 60-76).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/shushes-parlor-reclaiming-conversation-metaphor/61780?camid=4v1a