

“Lifelong Learning” in 6 Minutes and 40 Seconds

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John Dove, “Lifelong Learning” in 6 Minutes and 40 Seconds” (2013). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315231>

“Lifelong Learning” in 6 Minutes and 40 Seconds

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The following is a transcription of a live presentation at the 2013 Charleston Conference. Slides and video are available online at <http://sched.co/1h0qEhY>.

Thank you, Anthony. I must add that you did not mention what credentials I have as a lifelong learner. I entered Oberlin College in 1965 and finally graduated 26 years later in 1991. At least among the graduates, I was the only one who had a job already.

Before we begin there are a few slides that are required by the PechaKucha organization, and while those are running, I am going to tell you all about how PechaKuchas work. They were first developed in 2003 by two architects in Tokyo, Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham. They are a sort of haiku of PowerPoint.

You get precisely 20 slides in a PechaKucha, and they automatically progress every 20 seconds whether you are ready for the next slide or not. One important benefit of all PechaKuchas is that even the lousy ones are lousy for only 6 minutes and 40 seconds. Then the speaker has to shut up and sit down.

I first learned about PechaKuchas from Ganesh Ramachandran who is a Boston-area architect in my Toastmasters group. The phrase “PechaKucha” in Japanese means “chatterbox.” Now, Ganesh and I have often joked that this technique would be good for the rehabilitation of incessant talkers. You must know some of them, the people who simply cannot shut up. We have even thought of starting a self-help group with a 12-step program. We already have a name for this. It will be called “On-and-on-and-on Anon.” Now let us do this PechaKucha on Lifelong Learning.

Credo’s CEO, Mike Sweet, has given me an assignment to attend a variety of academic conferences taking up an ongoing inquiry into ways in which Credo can affect the quality of teaching and learning. Over the next 6 minutes, I am going to share with you some of the books and speakers who have inspired me in this inquiry.

First, is a little book that I came across at the S.H.A.R.P. conference in Oxford Brookes University. The “Literature of the Book” is published by the journal, *Logos*. It is a perfect learner’s guide to what I call the “metabooks,” or books about books. It has an annotated bibliography of the classics in each of about 20 disciplines that are represented in this conference.

This book has been my study guide for the past few years on subjects like the business of publishing, reference, licensing, e-books, libraries, and librarianship, and it has a table called the “Matrix of the Book” which lists the core disciplines that are needed in each of our professions.

We must master these skills; reading the classics of our disciplines prepares us to look out for trends and game changers. One important trend is lifelong learning itself. My grandfather had a single career. My mother had three careers. I have had six so far, and I can imagine one or two more.

My third career started in 1968 when I joined a Wall Street startup, Interactive Data Corporation, as a developer of stock market databases. A good developer must always be able to separate the essential aspects of knowledge from the particular details of the current technology. It is what distinguishes a software architect from a programmer. I designed the file system for these databases with virtual arrays which are independent of the physical storage. This turned out to be important. I called a techie at IDC last week and he told me that this file system is still running. This is remarkable given the dramatic drop in the price of storage.

Today \$2,500 can purchase you 50 trillion bytes. That is enough to represent every book ever published. Wow! Now I ask you, if you did this would it be useful? No, not without the skills that are represented in this conference.

Now I would like to introduce you to Sir Ken Robinson. He gave the keynote at last year's NCTE. His TED Talk is the most downloaded TED Talk in history. He argues that our education systems fail miserably at helping us find our best career: a combination of what we are good at and what we love doing.

Looking back my first two careers, I loved and I was good at them but I think I would like to add a few additional criteria for the perfect job: I would also like to make a reasonable wage, a chance to work with people I know and respect, and the opportunity to influence others

By these measures, my current career, supporting libraries with technology, is the perfect career for me. I have been at this about 15 years now, and I can easily see doing it for another 15 years. I certainly get to work with people I like and respect, and I think I am having an impact.

Next, I would like to introduce you to Professor Diane Pike of Augsburg College. I met Diane at the American Sociological Association. There, she ran the conference threads on the quality of teaching for which she is a recognized expert. One of the insights that she shared is attributed to Paul Bloom, most famous for Bloom's taxonomy.

What Professor Pike pointed out is that there are three things that can be taught or learned: knowledge, skills, and attitude. As we listen this afternoon to the discussion about MOOCs, it will be interesting to think through how well do MOOCs deliver on each of these three types of learning?

When I think of the three, it seems to me we can probably all agree that attitude is the most important. If we instill in our students a love of learning, then, if later they face a game changer, they can fill the gap in their skills or knowledge. Without the right attitude, they will be stymied and left on the sidelines.

This reminds me of the part of the book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* where the English comp professor spells out a syllabus for a course that he calls "Gumptionology 101." He

argues that this is the course that all undergraduates should take.

Now, what if I could teach you a skill that affected your attitude? That is just what I am going to try to do right now. I learned this from a recent TED Talk by Amy Cuddy. Amy Cuddy is a Harvard business school professor who has experimented with students facing high-stakes evaluative situations like job interviews. She claims that this skill can improve your attitude and actually change the way your life unfolds, if you end up getting that dream job. She compared the brain chemistry of people who secretly practiced a display of power before a job interview with those who did not. Those who held a power pose for 2 minutes, hours later would score much higher on the job interview.

Just look at Usain Bolt for an example of this pose. (Red Sox fans are very familiar with this gesture.) I have made arrangements for a famous teacher, and lifelong learner himself, to help us with this. He would like each one of you to stand up and hold your arms overhead for 20 seconds. Do it! It is a beautiful thing. It is a beautiful thing.

[Twenty seconds of silence as an image of the Buddha with arms overhead in a show of victory is on the screen.]

All right, now are you ready? Are you ready to hear about MOOCs? Are they a game changer? The controversies are rampant:

Are they enabling teachers or putting them out of work?

Are they enhancing education or dumbing it down?

Are they facilitating face-to-face education or circumventing it?

Are they a threat to publishing or an opportunity?

The stakes are so high that I want to implore you to take a course that I would call the "Meta-MOOC." Get yourself or someone you trust to go and take a MOOC report back to you on their experience. We all need to have a well-grounded opinion about these things as this whole MOOC world unfolds. Thanks.