

(Conference Papers)

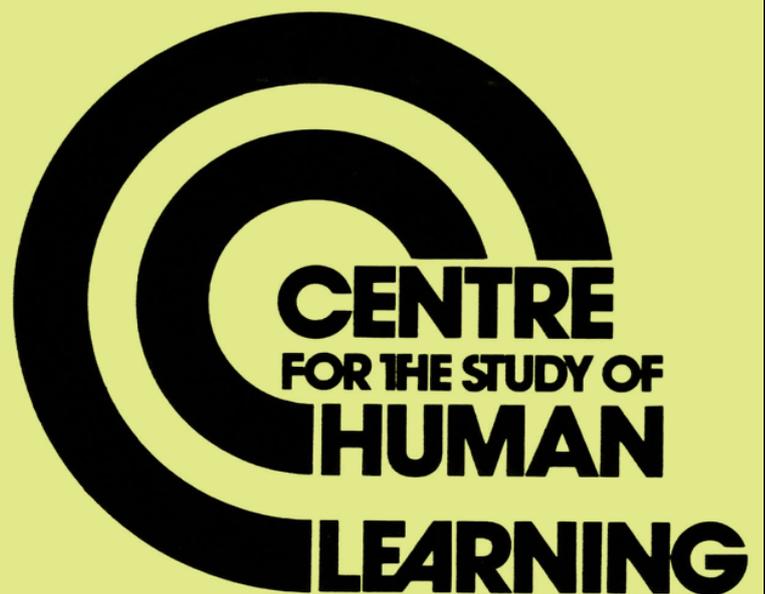
How to Become a Self-Organised Learner:

A Conversational Methodology For Learning-to-Learn in Action (Part II)

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NOTE

This is the second part of a paper dealing with a person-centred approach to the teaching/learning enterprise. PART I introduced the concept of the 'Learning Conversation' and it was argued that conversational methodologies could be recruited for personalising the monitoring of TMA's.

PART II defines a paradigm for conversational methodology and shows how 'Conversational Networks' can replace authoritarian structures within educational institutions.

However sophisticated its technology, resource, and institutional organisation, the effectiveness of an educational enterprise ultimately depends on the quality of the interaction between its participating members. Encounters at any level of the organisation (as an example within the Open University - students' self-help groups, students and tutors, tutors counsellors and staff tutors, staff tutors monitors and senior counsellors, regional staff and course teams, members of course teams, committee members and so on) must be seen as personally meaningful learning experiences, for each member taking part. Viewed in this way the whole democratic enterprise can have a profound impact on the individuals and on the organisation.

Let us first examine the 'learning event', whereby personal understanding is achieved, giving emphasis to the promotion of personal autonomy.

A PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH TO THE LEARNING EVENT

Stripping the learning situation down to its essential constituents, reveals a core triad: the learner, the resource and the teacher. According to the creed of the times, the relationship within this triad gets interpreted in different ways. Within contemporary society, a person-centred, personal excellence and self-actualising approach is beginning to colour the relationship. The teacher is seen and sees himself as a facilitator of the interaction between the learner and his chosen resource. It is very easy to misinterpret or trivialise the problems involved in this facilitating role. 'Permissiveness' interpreted as a laissez faire free for all spree is an example. Two questions which have so far remained only partially answered in contemporary education practice, demand deep and widespread study, if a person-centred-approach to learning is to be effectively operationalised: I

- i) What are the optimum conditions which make it possible for a learner to interact in a self-organised way with his resources?
- ii) What are the unique inner process that initiate, sustain or restyle the 'cognitive maps' of one person? I

I shall briefly introduce the work at the Centre for the Study of Human Learning* to show how its members have explored answers to these questions.

ON BECOMING A SELF-ORGANISED LEARNER

Acquiring competency in learning is difficult to achieve. Developing skills for facilitating learning competency in others is equally difficult. Neither the educational climate nor the person's ability to understand himself foster the essential pre-requisites for a movement towards autonomy. Educational research has not been too helpful in its contribution to this area. Some research efforts actually restrict rather than enhance self-organisation. In extreme, instructional materials may be so programmed that the learner has little to do but rote learn or paraphrase the manufactured product. Even when opportunities for personal exploration are given, these are seldom so open-ended that the learner is free to develop his own purposes and arrive at his own conclusions. The recent emphasis on study and examination skills offers the learner a battery of prescriptions and slogans for independent learning. Although partially useful, these algorithms embody the purposes and strategies of those few individuals who have found these procedures helpful for them in achieving their own purposes. The danger is, that this 'cook book' approach gets swallowed whole, rather than responded to within the learner's own strivings for individually 'tailor made' strategies, which meet his personal needs. The onus must be on the learner to develop his own ways.

The Centre has been pre-occupied with this issue for several years. Its members have explored methodologies which foster a person-centred approach to learning. Personal construct theory (1) has formed the underpinnings of this work. The outcome has been the development of a conversational methodology within which the pay-off for the participating individuals has been exciting and challenging. Learning skills (reading, listening, discussing, writing, 'thinking' and 'doing') have improved by as much as 200-500% when based on criteria which are learner initiated. This improvement has fed over into academic performance. It has also fed over into real life situations. (2)

At this point I intend to review the major findings briefly, to show the kinds of problems which must be overcome if self-organisation is to be encouraged.

- 1) Human beings from 5 to 80 year olds readily habituate into stable and sub-optimal ways of interacting with their environments. These cycles of activity are seldom appraised by them. Partly, because of the social and educational climate, mediocre skills are viewed as innate or environmentally determined and therefore unchangeable. For any major improvement in learning skill to take place, people have to learn to change such attitudes and to develop skills for breaking those self-perpetuating cycles of behaviour, which imprison them and stunt their growth.

*FOOTNOTE: The centre for the Study of Human Learning is part of the School of Social Sciences at Brunel University. Under the direction of Laurie Thomas, postgraduates are pursuing action research projects in schools, colleges, polytechnics, university and industrial organisations. This work is based on the need to develop tools, procedures and methods for promoting self-organising in learning.

- 2) This can only be done by getting 'in touch' with their own learning processes. Awareness of these processes depends on acquiring the skill of dividing one's attention between 'observing the self in action' and actually 'implementing the action'. Untutored people seem unable to 'observe themselves' because they cannot 'remember themselves'.
- 3) This is because they lack a language for articulating these experiences. This language (call it Martian) is not just an accumulation of a new set of terms, but becomes for the learner a descriptive system for conceptualising the process of learning. Consciousness raising tools and a model for encouraging the development of a process language facilitate this 'self-observation'.
- 4) To facilitate skills in 'self-observation' the interaction between the participant learner (3) and this resource requires careful mediation. An open-ended methodology for conducting 'Learning Conversations' has been developed for achieving effective awareness review and development of deeply embedded and stunted skills.
- 5) This 'Learning Conversation' requires three parallel dialogues. Together these reflect the learner's cognitive processes back to him, support him through stressful periods of change and encourage him to develop stable referents which anchor his judgement of the quality of learning. Within any one 'conversational event' these dialogues are necessarily interwoven. Intervalisation of the dialogues produces the self-organised learner and is a step towards the fully-functioning man or woman.

LEARNING CONVERSATIONS - ONE MAJOR ASSUMPTION

The culture of a given civilisation, its arts, science technology, social system and religion is a store-house of its strongest and most enduring systems of 'public meaning'. 'Personalising' this meaning should have a greater context than academic learning relevant to a part of life called school and only tested out in examinations.

If learning is to be an enriching experience, the meanings that emerge must be personally significant in some part of a person's life. The viability of these meanings depends on how richly the individual incorporates them into his experiences. They must prove useful and effective in mediating his transactions with life;

transactions with stored knowledge; books, tape, film, discs, computers

transactions with people; teachers, colleagues, peer learners, parents, spouse, love, boss

transactions with the world around; motorcycles, kites, gadgetries, animals, clothes, food ...

The process of learning how to learn provides individuals with skills for incorporating chosen aspects of their culture into their experience in active personally meaningful terms. They are also in a position to test and these understandings in their living, by doing, talking, thinking and feeling, investigating and sharing. Only if these understandings;

afford them greater insights into their own processes,

enhance their power of communication,

help them to identify and use more opportunities for rewarding transactions with objects, people and events,

do they become viable and durable for self-organised individuals.

A PARADIGM FOR LEARNING CONVERSATIONS

Once two or more individuals agree to embark on an enquiry into promoting creative learning experiences for each participating member they have a problem of methodology. If they base their programme on non-adoptive responses to controlled variables (prefixed aims, purposes, strategies and outcomes), then the result will be authoritarian and impersonal. Such statistically-based orthodox methods are a legacy which psychology and education have inherited from the physical and biological sciences. Whilst scientists such as Heisenberg, Polanyi, Waddington, Lorenz and Sakharov have been changing the nature of scientific enquiry, those engaged in educational research have continued to build their discipline on methodological assumptions which are outmoded. This is doubly disastrous. Not only are their findings outmoded but they convey a false impression and stunted view of man. Conversational techniques are required, since social scientists deal with subject matter (people) which construe them as they the scientists construe the people. In effect, each person in the conversational enterprise is his own scientist, using his 'theories' for the basis of action, testing, improving, validating or discarding 'data', which are the consequences of their action, in the light of these theories. Inadequate 'theories' can lead to inappropriate action and can be viewed as the source of what Rogers (3) views as disruptions of natural growth.

Each person starts from a different position and has different sets of needs and purposes. These must be negotiated if the encounter is to be personally effective. Only by accepting the autonomy of the individual (scientist) and joining in a co-operative exploration can they discover the processes of learning and create a personally meaningful encounter.

Conversational methodology accepts each person as a full participant and uses his unique position as observer of his internal events.

Emphasis is given to the appreciation of man in process and this requires a whole new language system which describes inner experiences and behaviour. Awareness raising activities whereby process language is developed have been virtually ignored in the educational set up. Rogers (3) comes closest to it but whilst his understanding of the conditions within which personal growth take place is highly relevant, he pays little attention how personal meaning is construed. Kelly's theory of personal constructs (1) focuses on personal meanings. These are bi-polar differentiations revealed by the similarities and differences which the person conceives and perceives in his or her inner and outer world. The constructs are hierarchically organised as a system within which meaning is created, stored and attributed. This process of modelling experience on the more or less viable meanings enables the person to anticipate events.

This approach can be used as a starting point for observing learning processes. Learning might be defined as:

"the construction and exchange of personally relevant and viable meanings" (4).

This implies that the conditions for learning-to-learn must be 'conversational'. But the design of the 'conversation' must be as rigorous as that of an orthodox experiment, although different in kind. Because it comprises two or more separate semi-autonomous modes of planning and information (the participant subjects) the rigour must arise from a negotiated agreement to proceed with a joint model of the enquiry and agreed tools for generalising and collecting data.

Within the O.U., the student/tutor or student/counsellor interphase, for example, would have to ensure that the student assumes joint responsibility with the tutor or counsellor for bringing his or her learning processes under review. Together they learn to negotiate the purposes of learning from the learner's personal needs; to develop more effective strategies and tactics in learning and to review the criteria of the enterprise. As the student moves to greater self-organisation he takes more of the tutor's activities into himself. He becomes his own tutor and the 'learning conversations' continue within his head.

LEARNING CONVERSATION: THE TOOLS

Awareness and review of the attribution of 'personal meaning' arising from a 'conversational' encounter depends on specific procedures. A series of tools have been developed which have been designed to generate data in the execution of these procedures and to display this data so that heightened awareness enables individuals to review the process of meaning attribution. They are thus in a position to break out of habitual modes of transactions and to develop more effective ways. The footnote* lists some tools and refers to published sources. In addition to these given tools, each group can develop their own tailor-made tools to meet their personal needs. Such tools can only be effective if and when they are used 'conversationally' for raising awareness of different aspects of the learning process.

The 'conversational' use of such tools require:-

- i) some observational record of externalisation of an aspect of learning, such as PURPOSE, STRATEGY, OUTCOME or REVIEW.
- ii) a display and procedure for 'talk-back' which is detailed and specific enough to enable individuals to validly reconstruct the experience.
- iii) This should facilitate 'talk-back' between levels in the hierarchy of the process of learning (for example, Purpose-Sub-purposes, Strategy-Tactics) and to relate and integrate different aspects of the process at any one given level. (for example, relating PURPOSE-OUTCOME, or PURPOSE-STRATEGY-OUTCOME). I
- iv) a language in which the description of inner experience and behaviour can be articulated in sufficient detail and accuracy to create a new level of awareness of one's own processes.

* FOOTNOTE - tools for raising awareness Focused grids, group grids, consensus grids, demon and double demon, computer aided conversations, structures of meaning procedures, self-elicited, purpose taxonomies, autobiographical techniques. Centre for the Study of Human Learning Technical Report: Tools for Raising Awareness of the Learning Process.

- v) the incorporation of this new awareness into an integrated 'theory' so that effective alternatives can be constructed.
- vi) the testing out of alternatives in real situations.
- vii) a system of evaluation which:-
 - a) indicates the merits and demerits of each alternative.
 - b) throws up indications of the conceptual directions in which more adequate alternatives might be sought.
- viii) a system of support which enables an individual to intensely explore the awareness and review process.
- ix) a procedure for weaning the learning away from the tool, replacing it with an enhanced perception and language through which the learner (s) can achieve the same effects, unsupported from the outside. I

LEARNING CONVERSATION: THE LANGUAGE

In one sense the 'Learning Conversation' is all conducted in one language: the native language of the participants. But whilst acknowledging all the dangers (real and imagined) of offering new systems of jargon, one outstanding feature of 'Learning Conversations' and success in conducting them, is that there appears to be a real need to negotiate a system of referent language with each new participant.

One reason for this is that much of what gets talked about during the 'Learning Conversation' is completely new to the participant. Most people find it impossible to talk about their own learning processes, learning purposes and methods in anything but the most general bizarre and inexact terms. This is because they have only very rudimentary and bizarre models of the learning process and almost no language in which to describe their experience to themselves. This variation of the Whorf hypothesis continually arises in each new 'conversation'. It poses various problems:

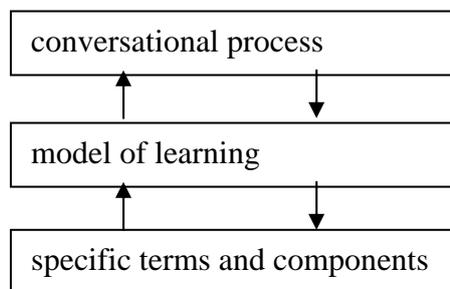
- (i) There is a very difficult question raised by the non-verbal nature of many of the communications which facilitate a 'Learning Conversation'. They may develop a non-verbal language which is both more immediately relevant and productive than the more explicit verbal languages. Such non-verbal languages tend to be very personal and difficult to share. I
- (ii) If there is no shared view (or theory) of the processes, purposes and methods of learning, each term must be differentiated and mapped onto shared experience if effective 'conversation' in that area is to occur.
- (iii) If one dominant participant brings a pre-conceived language and theory into the situations it is very difficult for the other to create a personal understanding out of it, unless the process of language/experience/meaning negotiation is made explicit.
- (iv) As with any intense specialist groups the effectiveness of a 'Learning Conversation' seems to develop hand in hand with the emergence of a private technical language in

providing a more exact and parsimonious vehicle for the articulation of experience and exchange of experience, new levels of previously inconceivable competence are achieved.

Each tool or aid to 'conversation' requires its own technical terms. The explicitness of these tools seems to facilitate recognition of the need for these languages, but how each person picks it up and uses it is a question of personal style.

More importantly, and with more associated difficulties, there is a need for a language in which to talk about learning; and to talk about it in ways that break long existing habits, create greater flexibility and operationalise the processes of change.

No claim is made for the following language other than that it has developed out of a fair amount of varied experience which has always been fairly intensively reviewed. Other systems of language (Pask, Skinner, Bruner, Rogers) have been raided and cannibalised to produce a composite, as no one seemed sufficient. It is convenient to consider the language at three levels.



LEVELS IN A META-LANGUAGE FOR ACHIEVING CONVERSATIONAL CONTROL

In order to convey the flavour this language, examples of terminology at the three levels is offered:

Conversational Process

.... process, feedback, Learning-to-Learn, tutorial, mirroring, referent, support, self-generated feedback, trust, buffering, empathy, personal knowing, tacit knowledge, shared meaning

Models of Learning

.... needs, hierarchy, purpose, strategy, tactics, outcomes, taxonomy, structures of meaning, internal review, generative process, meaning attribution, prior knowledge

Specific terms

purpose rote, translation, interpretation, extrapolation, incorporation, supplementation, recognition, recall, re-construction, problem solving, analysis, synthesis, criteria, referents, levels, internal cues, external cues, specific facts, factual items, main points, summarise

strategy record, hesitation, flip back, flip forward, rate, change in rate, structure of meaning tactics, smooth, search, small item, large item, check monitoring, decision point, input, data processing

outcomes criteria, multiple choice, objective test, recall, recognition, free response, close procedure, comprehension, summary, essay-type

... Flow Diagram, link, main theme, elaboration, qualification, example, dialogue, argument ...

.... meaning structures, items, relations clusters, mapping, pattern inter-personal, two per so I sharing

.... written, verbal, behavioural, internal, external

SOME EXAMPLES OF THE META-LANGUAGE

A SCIENCE OF LEARNING CONVERSATIONS

A systematic methodology for learning-to-learn depends on identifying the nature and quality of the conversational transactions within learning events. A whole library of events has been created during the course of action research projects and these have been 'catalogued' to give a conversational taxonomy, out of which a science of Learning Conversation is beginning to emerge (5). These events reveal both the language and structural properties of the conversations.

The Three Dialogues

The focus of the conversation is the reflection of process; the learner reflects on his learning; the facilitator (tutor, counsellor, researcher) monitors this whilst reflecting on the management of the conversation. The facilitator's function can be described as **MIRRORING THE PROCESS TO THE LEARNER**. Mirroring leads to heightened awareness and this enables the learner to explore his skill, so that he moves towards greater competency and creativity.

The language of mirroring is trimorphic, generating three forms of dialogue: one dialogue deals with a **COMMENTARY ON PROCESS**; another with **SUPPORTING THE LEARNER DURING REFLECTION**, and the third dialogue is concerned with **REFERENTS FOR EVALUATING LEARNING COMPETENCE**.

1. Commentary on Process
2. Support during the uncertainties of reflection
3. Referents for reviewing learning competence

TOWARDS A THEORY OF LEARNING CONVERSATIONS THE FORMS IN THE LANGUAGE OF MIRRORING

The management of each dialogue depends on a different set of rules. These rules have been partially worked out.

Dialogue 1. Commentary on Process

This takes place at two levels. At one level a process and feedback language is being negotiated. The learning process is observed using the hard evidence provided by the awareness raising tools, and a theory offered by the facilitator. The whole process is reviewed for effectiveness. PURPOSE, STRATEGY, OUTCOME, REVIEW (PSOR) became components of this process language. At another level the facilitator offers a metacommentary on this language negotiation. The importance of developing a theory (or model) for interpreting the evidence of the records is stressed. (A PSOR model becomes one of "n" possibilities as the facilitator and learner negotiate.) The need to generate one's own feedback is also emphasised. MODEL AND FEEDBACK BECOME THE COMPONENTS OF THIS METACOMMENTARY.

Whilst the FACILITATOR IS OFFERING THIS METACOMMENTARY ON PROCESS, THUS RAISING THE LEARNER'S AWARENESS OF IT, HE IS ALSO PROVIDING THE EXPERIENTIAL TOOLS, FOR THE LEARNER TO COMPREHEND IT.

A characteristic feature of this dialogue is THE MARKED ALTERNATION BETWEEN EXTERNALLY OFFERED FEEDBACK AND SELF-GENERATED FEEDBACK. Whenever the learner was unable to generate feedback the researcher intuitively offers this. It was realised, retrospectively, that this dimension of structure and freedom was crucial for the process dialogue. The question is whether the learner's view of the teacher as a source of structure is an expected stereotype for that which should pertain in a learning process, or is it a relevant intrinsic part of the process? This issue of when to offer freedom was monitored throughout the study. In helping the learner to generate his own dialogue by constant metacommentary on process, a shift towards personal autonomy takes place. The learner began to set his own Purposes, interpret the Records, evaluate Outcomes and review the Whole Process. He INTERNALISES THE PROCESS DIALOGUE. HE GENERATES HIS OWN LANGUAGE, SELECTS HIS OWN FEEDBACK AND BECOMES DISCIPLINED IN ASSESSING HIS OWN COMPETENCY.

The Management of this structure - freedom dimension of the dialogue is polymodal. This involves moving between directive, guided and discovery modes. Directive intervention involves the researcher in taking over the interpretation of the Records. In guidance, a PSOR model is offered within which the learner interprets his own Records. For discovery, the learner is encouraged to develop his own model for interpreting the Records. The researcher takes on the role of mentor, offering counter arguments or propositions or even occasionally as madonna, shielding the learner from structure, whilst he generates his own.

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The management rules for this dialogue remain largely intuitive, but relate to a catalytic view of mirroring. The overall management aim is to CATALYSE THE LEARNER'S OWN STRIVINGS FOR AWARENESS, enabling him to invent his own constructions of his learning process and to generate his own personally relevant feedback. This commentary on process, is summarised as follows:

a. Negotiating a language for describing process and a metalanguage for reflecting on process.
b. Movement between offered feedback and self-generated feedback.
c. Structure and Freedom in the management of the conversation.

. COMMENTARY ON PROCESS

Dialogue 2. Supporting the Learners during Reflection

People become uncertain when exploring their learning processes. They become over-anxious when testing out the limits of their skill and understanding. In attempting to improve their level of proficiency they often start by getting worse! As a result they retreat into the safety and security of stasis or known routines of learning. THE SUPPORT DIALOGUE IS CONCERNED WITH HELPING THE LEARNER TO REMAIN A SPECTATOR OF HIS OWN PROCESS LONG ENOUGH TO EXPLORE IT IN DEPTH.

Many psychosocial factors are involved in support. Developing mutual trust in the tutorial relationship and 'buffering' the exploration of process are two outstanding events. Trust proved to be important in bridging that void between the uncertainty of being in process and the security of stasis. The facilitator and learner worked hard and long to achieve this relationship. Assessing the boundaries of permissiveness in the dialogue proves difficult. Is it over-indulgent or is it relevant to explore wide-ranging emotional, social and intellectual issues? As the student gradually recognises an honest intention to help him explore and review his own competence, trust in the relationship develops.

In lowering awareness of stress the researcher/tutor 'buffers' the learner's anxious state and this enables him to convert the energy locked up in anxiety into creative tension. Thus supported he explored hitherto unknown areas of skill. Buffering depended on withholding

structure and offering unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence (3). This often proved to be a most traumatic and exhausting experience for both participants.

Managing support depends on developing sensitivity to the changing inner states of the learner. Cues such as posture, facial expression and remarks such as 'I hate Flow Diagrams', 'that Record is wrong - I didn't read that way' were used as indicators for moving into a support dialogue. This dialogue is summarised as follows:

a. Breakthrough to mutual trust
b. Buffering: converting anxiety into creative tension
c. Sensitivity to the state of the learner in managing support

SUPPORT DURING THE UNCERTAINTIES OF REFLECTION

Dialogue 3: Referents for Evaluating Learning Competence

Having encouraged the learner to develop a language for exploring process and supported his in depth exploration of it, the researcher/tutor still leaves him with a dilemma. If he is to rely solely on his own evaluation how will the learner ever know the actual degree of skill which he has achieved?

He can compare with others THROUGH EXCHANGING AND DISCUSSING RECORDS, PURPOSES AND OUTCOMES. In progressing through a sequence of personal interpersonal and group review the learner can relate his own assessment to a wider field of public assessment. Managing this dialogue is concerned with helping him to choose appropriate referents. This evaluation dialogue is summarised as follows:

a. Using yourself as referent
b. Using another as referent
c. Using a referent group and Managing the choice of referents

REFERENTS FOR REVIEWING LEARNING COMPETENCE

Any sample of Learning Conversation may contain components of any of the three dialogues. Obviously they interrelate complexly and richly in a conversational event. DURING THE CONVERSATION, THE FACILITATOR ACTS AS ARTICULATOR OF ALL THREE DIALOGUES, AS THE LEARNER EXPLORES THE RESOURCES. IN MOVING TOWARDS GREATER SELF-ORGANISATION THE LEARNER INTERNALISES THE DIALOGUES AND LEARNS TO ARTICULATE THESE FOR HIMSELF.

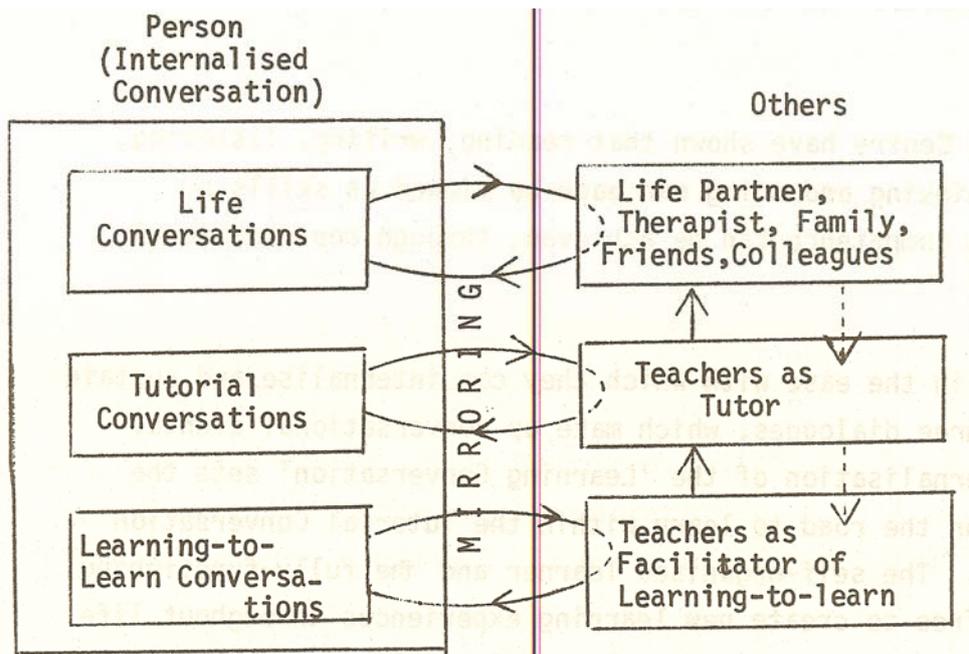
Studies at the Centre have shown that reading, writing, listening, discussion, thinking and doing can each be viewed as skills by which learning competence can be achieved, through conversational encounters.

People differ in the ease with which they can internalise and sustain each of the three dialogues, which make up conversational events. Effective internalisation of the 'Learning Conversation' sets the learner well on the road to learn within the 'Tutorial Conversation' and from life. The self-organised learner and the fully-functioning man/woman is free to create new learning experiences throughout life. Frozen internal conversations disable people as learners and it is only when the educational climate offers this external conversation that the frozen processes can be revived.

Early stages of the 'Learning Conversation' involve an apprentice and a master, but for conversation to occur there must be a small area where the two participants meet as equals. As he becomes more self-organised, the conversation disappears into the apprentice's head. He becomes his own master. If he is to continue to develop the conversation does not stop He continues to set up the three dialogues as he experiments with each resource he encounters. That part of the 'conversation' which remains in his head must be available for awareness, otherwise it is all too easy to sink back again into fixed habitual actions. That aspect of the 'Learning Conversation' which goes on with future masters becomes more concerned with complex issues and learning organised over larger periods of time.

Learning-to-Learn, Tutoring and Life Conversations

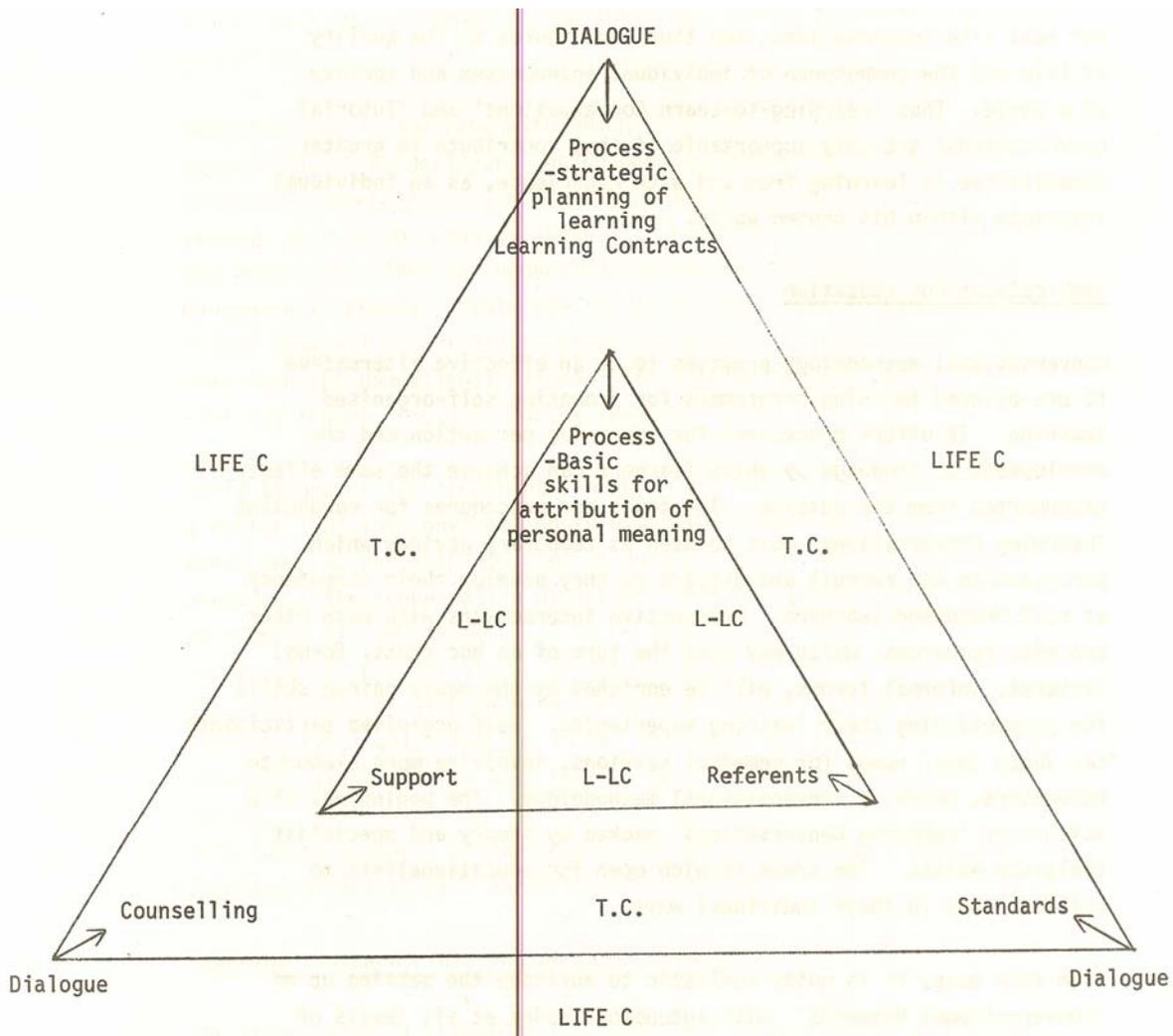
The structuring of 'Learning Conversations' within short, medium and longer time intervals has led us to a hierarchical view of the learning-to-learn encounter. Three levels of conversation have been differentiated, as shown.



THE CONVERSATIONAL PROCESSES

The 'Learning-to-Learn Conversation, is primarily concerned with skills by which personal understanding is achieved. The detailed interaction by which habits can be broken, reviewed and rebuilt, becomes the focus of attention. The 'Tutorial Conversation' on the other hand is more concerned with the long term strategic aspects of learning; the planning of goals and the execution of purposes over a period of weeks, months or years. It depends on the establishment of explicit learning contracts where the content of the learning is negotiated, the needs articulated into specific purposes, the resources identified and the strategies put into action. The deployment of basic learning skills, when to sit down and think, to look things over, to peruse in the library, to tune into broadcasts, or to record notes, form part of conversation. It can also raise the issue of when a student should spend time raising his level of competence in any one skill. It is when such decisions are made that the 'Tutorial conversation' refers back to the 'Learning-to-Learn Conversation'.

As with 'Learning-to-Learn conversations' the central function of Tutorial Conversations is the quest for greater self-organisation in learning. Awareness and review of these strategic aspects of learning become the focus of attention. The relationship between 'the conversations' within the paradigm of learning-to-learn can be expressed as follows:



THE THREE CONVERSATIONS: AWARENESS AND REVIEW

Some people seem to develop the knack to live fully, learning from experience and continually 'finding themselves' in each new activity. They may be dons or dustmen, mogul or mechanics, playboys or prostitutes, disabled victims or devout Buddhists; what they share is the ability to create 'Life Conversations' around them. Life takes on structure and purpose, it is exciting and fully engaging. Education is only justifiable if it adds to the number of nodes for real life conversations, and thus contributes to the quality of life and the competence of individual enterprises and society as a whole. Thus 'Learning-to-Learn Conversations' and 'Tutorial Conversations' are only supportable if they contribute to greater capabilities in learning from and with experience, as an individual interacts within his chosen world

Implications for Education

Conversational methodology promises to be an effective alternative to pre-planned teaching programmes for promoting self-organised learning. It offers procedures for enhancing perception and the development of language by which learners can achieve the same effects unsupported from the outside. The tools and procedures for conducting 'Learning Conversations' must be seen as temporary devices which participants can recruit and discard

as they develop their competency as self-organised learners. Prospective interactions with each other and with resources, which may take the form of ad hoc chats, formal lectures, informal forums, will be enriched by the newly gained skills for personalising these learning experiences. Self-organised participants can judge their needs for remedial sessions, involving more elaborate encounters, based on conversational methodology. The beginnings of a science of 'Learning Conversation' backed by theory and specialist tools now exists. The arena is wide open for educationalists to build on this in their individual ways.

From this base, it is quite realistic to envisage the setting up of 'Conversational Networks' with autonomous nodes at all levels of an educational organisation. Each node defines its own responsibilities, within the context of the total network and achieves this by practising 'Learning Conversations' within and between nodes. A fully participative democratic autonomous corpus supporting semi-independent units, which in turn support it, becomes feasible. Industrial organisations have already been forced to take the lead in forging such networks. Such organisations can't afford to fail and innovations involving conversational techniques are being practised on a large scale. Unless educational institutions quickly follow suit, they are in danger of becoming anachronistic monstrosities of our times.

The education system needs to creatively re-construe its purposes, methods and function. Learning-to-Learn should become a central theme enabling learners to become more competent and self-organised. This would release the subject-matter experts to concentrate on exhibiting the exciting nature of their own enthusiasms. Once Learning-to-Learn is seen as a legitimate exercise in its own right creating autonomous learners, then all the traditional instructional techniques take on a different aspect. Learning contracts and programmed texts, item banks and work placements, computer aided instruction, broadcasts, and overhead projectors, all fall into place as resources which staff and learners can use to optimise their purposes.

Those who are involved in decision making on educational expenditure in these stringent times, should take careful account of this approach which promises a pay-off out of all proportion to equivalent expenditures in other areas of educational endeavour. Not only does learning performance improve in the educational situation but it can carry over, continuing to payoff with each new opportunity to learn in life, at work, in courses and in leisure.

The cumulative rewards for our rapidly changing, crisis ridden industrial society in increased competence, flexibility and versatility, open up new vistas for human destiny. Looking further ahead into the human prospect, if man is to survive beyond doomsday and shape a new kind of industrial society, the vulnerable individual must be given a chance to learn to become responsible and skilled in creating new kinds of social contract. Whether changes in the destiny of humans is brought about by Malthusian type checks or by wisdom or foresight, depends largely on the experience we now offer for learning-to-learn in the classrooms, lecture rooms, studies and laboratories of our educational institutions.

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