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THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-ORGANISATION LEARNERS:

THE C.S.H.L. LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

FOR CONVERSATIONAL INDIVIDUALS,

GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN LEARNING

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THE CENTRE

Consultants, Postgraduates and Members of the CSHL form a network of professional people concerned with Human Learning in all its aspects and who are involved in helping others to become more competent and self-organised learners. They work in Education, Commerce, Health Service, Industry and various Government Agencies.

The Centre for the Study of Human Learning has existed as a partially self-financing Research Institute in Brunel University since 1967. Constitutionally it has its own Governing Board which advises on policy and future planning. It is responsible directly to Senate. Within the University the Centre offers; a postgraduate programme, 'learning-to-learn' opportunities for undergraduates and staff development seminars with academic colleagues. However, the self-financing requirement ensures that many of its activities are directed outside the University. It has run courses, workshops, and conferences for educational, governmental, industrial and commercial organisations in Britain and in the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and Mexico, as well as a number of European countries.

Research is mainly directed towards the study of human learning in its natural habitats. This has lead to the creation of a theory of Learning Conversations and a continually expanding range of awareness raising techniques. These combine to enable individuals and groups to personally research their skills as learners, so that they may more effectively control the direction, quality and content of their learning. This action-research has been and is funded from a variety of sources including; The Nuffield Foundation, The Department of Education and Science, The Social Science Research Council, The Welsh Office and The Ministry of Defence, The Post Office as well as Industrial and Commercial Organisations. The Centre also offers consultancy services and receives people on short secondments to familiarise themselves with its approach and to help them to make practical use of its Conversational Methods and Reflective Learning Technology.

AIMS

1. To research personal learning processes and to invent new tools, procedures and techniques for enabling people to become more aware of, reflect upon and review their learning competence.

2. To develop a systematic methodology of learning conversations for enabling individuals to become more skilled and autonomous learners.

3. To work with education, commerce and government establishments to maximise the advantages of self-organised learning for the individual, small groups, the institution and society.

A PHILOSOPHY OF PERSONAL LEARNING

Starting from such influences as Carl Rogers, George Kelly, Warren McCullough, Michael Polanyi, Robert Pirsig and the radical intuitivism of Zen teachers, members of the Centre have come to view personal learning as:

> 'the construction, reconstruction, negotiation and exchange
> of personally relevant and viable meaning',

and to view personal meaning as:

> 'the patterns of thoughts and feelings which are the basis
> of all action'.

The aim has, therefore, been to develop a technology which allows learners to reflect systematically on both their behaviour and their experience in personally relevant ways. This technology is designed to be content-free and to enable each individual to research their own learning in their own terms.

Learning-to-Learn is seen as being in direct contrast to study skills materials in which the Captive Learner is taught how to be taught. The Self-Organised Learner can learn on courses or on the job, in school or by private study, from carefully prepared materials or from the varied but more haphazard resources naturally available from day to day.

A recurrent problem within traditional educational technology has been that concepts such as 'independent learning', 'autonomous learning', 'self paced materials', 'computer aided learning' and 'discovery methods' can easily be trivialised. This is partly because researchers and tutors do not escape the belief that learning can only be measured by reference to standard public knowledge: and it derives partly from the technologists inability to create truly personal learning environments.

In designing 'individualised' learning programmes, the objectives, strategies and criteria for assessment are usually preset by the tutor , leaving learners little freedom to pursue their purposes and set their own standards. 'Independent' learning, so defined, at best leads to successfully submitting to being taught. At worst it leads to such pathologies as dissatisfaction, loss of motivation, over dependence, and alienation from learning.

THE NEED FOR A CONVERSATIONAL METHODOLOGY

If learners are to achieve self-organisation the teaching/learning process must become truly conversational. Both teachers and learners are separate sources of valid meaning. Each must value and appreciate the other's contributions if creative exchange is to take place. But contributors are not all equal. In an effective conversation, control is passed back and forth among participants as they recognise the nature of what each has to contribute. The process of a conversation can be distinguished and described separately from its content. For example, in tutorials about Chemistry, Mathematics, Welsh, Law, Psychotherapy, or Man-management, needs and purposes can be clarified and agreed, tactics and strategies can be discussed and monitored and criteria for judging the quality of outcomes can be constructed and applied. The conditions for creative conversation require that the content of any exhange is modulated according to a shared model of the process and that this model of the process itself remains negotiable. Such conversation is rare. People value it when it does occur, but they can rarely create the conditions to make it happen. A person may achieve such creative conversation within himself or herself or in feeling totally at one with some relevant component of the outside world. Pirsig claims such events may occur in servicing a motorcycle. Each of us can identify our own special events in which we had this rare experience of these rare events. We have designated such creative conversational events as 'C-indi's', 'C-indi's are the proper and only habitat of effective human learning.

C-INDI'S AND THE RELATIVITY OF MEANING

This conversational entity, the C-indi, can be recognised by the experience of constructing, exchanging and negotiating personally relevant and viable meaning. Such experiences have been defined by Maslow as those in which the criteria for appreciating them can only arise out of the experience itself. They are both self-referent and self-assessed.
The Science of Learning Conversations is the study of the conditions in which C-indi's are propagated and grow. The C.S.H.L. reflective learning technology attempts to create such conditions and thus increase the probability of creative personal learning. The creation of such experiences demands a different approach to educational technology. Whilst established public knowledge is still valued as a rich cumulative resource of carefully systematised and evaluated experience, it can no longer be treated as the one and only absolute referent for personal knowing.
Meaning is relative to it's time and place and to the intentionalities of its construer. So, the final arbiter of the effectiveness of learning is always the learner himself or herself. To be truly conversational, the technology of learning must allow relevance and viability to be assesed by the learner. The criteria and referents used by the learner may be challenged and renegotiated ut they can not be ignored, denied or arbitrarily over-ridden without destroying the sources of self-confidence and self-sustaining efforts.

ATTRIBUTES OF A PERSONAL LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

The C.S.H.L. has recruited certain procedures and invented and developed many others to meet the requirements of this Conversational Technology.

(a) The first requirement is that each individual may negotiate their thoughts, feelings and actions in their own terms.

(b) The second, is that records of behaviour are viewed not as evidence for the instructor, teacher or trainer to evaluate, but as a guide which the learner may use to re-construct their experience and evaluate their own performance.

(c) The third requirement is that personal knowing can be represented in forms which learners feel do not significantly distort their meanings.

The paradox is that many of the forms of public knowledge such as mathematical symbols, musical notation, specific art-forms, engineering drawings, the essay, chemical formulae, etc., can all serve to represent personal meaning. In fact they were each and all invented because their authors were unable to express their meanings fully and economically in the previous existing forms. But without a truly conversational methodology they remain for most learners mere tokens of public knowledge devoid of personal meaning.
Unexpected forms of content-free procedures for representing meaning such as FOCUSed repertory grids, the flow diagram of a text and the other 'structures of meaning' techniques developed at the Centre force the user to express their own meanings in their own terms. Having represented their meaning they can then value it, extend it, exchange it, and combine it with the meanings of others. Learners are presented with a technology for generating conversation, within themselves and with others. Having recognised the personal nature of all meaning, they become free to use the more conventional forms to represent it.

THE ANATOMY OF A LEARNING CONVERSATION

For a person to become a fully functioning C-indi they must learn to recognise, represent and thus control their own processes. They must also learn to delve into and explore their own experience, to enrich the content of the internal conversation. The Learning Conversation encourages the growth of this capacity. In its **TUTORIAL MODE** this leads the learner to the formulation of a learning contract in terms of **PURPOSE, STRATEGY** and **ANTICIPATED OUTCOME**. After an attempt has been made to carry out the contract the Review leads the learner to reflect upon their learning competance. Poor learning performance may come about in two very different ways. Learners may have wanted to achieve the contract and yet not have had the necessary skill and competencies. The **LEARNING-TO-LEARN MODE** of the Learning Conversation leads them into a self-diagnosis of their learning strengths and weaknesses and into conversational activities designed to help them achieve greater capacity for learning. Poor performance resulting from lack of interest leads into the **RELEVANCE** or **LIFE CONVERSATION MODE**. Here the learner is asked to identify long term needs and purposes and to differentiate these into shorter term recognitions of the relevance or inappropriateness of the current learning contracts. In its 'heavy' forms such life, course or career counselling can save days, months or even years of alienation, misery and misspent effort. In its 'lighter' forms the Relevance conversation can identify the personal structure of a topic and thus help learners chart their own paths to involvement in it. Choice of specific techniques to be recruited into the Learning Conversation depends upon the nature of the application. Learning Skills, Learning Situations and Topics to be learned may all require special techniques for awareness raising.

GROUPS AS PERSONAL LEARNING NETWORKS

The concept of a 'C-indi' applies to any conversational entity. Thus a working group, course team, a quality circle, etc., can use the learning conversation technology to enhance its co-operative learning capacity. This use of the technology to create learning networks has again required the development of tools and procedures specifically designed to record group activity and represent the pattern of similarities and differences between the personal meanings of its members. Soft-ware packages for use with this technology include: **PAIRS, DIFF, EXCHANGE, GROUP THESAURUS, CONCENSUS FRAMES, CHART, SOCIO-NETS** etc.

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These papers and reports are available directly from the C.S.H.L., subject to the restrictions noted on page 27.
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KEY: *   Out of Print
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      *** Project for PhD (CSHL)........inter-library loan)
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The price of each paper is £3.00 unless otherwise stated (inclusive of postage and packing.

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WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS

The Self-Organised Learning and Learning-to-Learn workshops offered by the Centre have aroused widespread interest. They focus on a range of learning skills: for example, discussion, reading, writing, listening, thinking and feeling (construing) decision making, subjective judgement and management development and language learning.

The courses, workshops and seminars vary in time, structure and scope but always introduce the concept of Learning Conversations. These centre on the idea of a learning contract (either implicit for explicit) which can be negotiated in 'Tutorial Conversations'. The quality of the learning contract and the processes of carrying it out are explored in the 'Learning-to-Learn Conversation'. Alienation or lack of interest in learning arises from either a perceived or real lack of relevance to the individual learner. The personal needs and purposes served by learning are explored in the 'Life Conversation'. Alienation or lack of interest in learning arises from either a perceived or real lack of relevance to the individual learner. The personal needs and purposes served by learning are explored in the 'Life Conversation'. Thus the Learning Conversation is itself hierarchical, and movement within it depends on the needs, competency and experiences of the learner.

The personal skills, methodology, procedures and tools required to develop and sustain these three Learning Conversations as a highly-articulate systematic continuing awareness-raising experience, form the main theme of each course.

Direct experience in the use of listening, discussion, reading, writing, thinking etc., and the carrying out of relevant manual operations (e.g soldering, origami, judging the quality of toffee, or assembling toys) is always offered in context which raises awareness of the processes of learning. The nature of the course and the interests of the participants determine the depth and intensity with which the skills are explored.

The BRUNEL READING RECORDER and associated PAPER AND PENCIL TECHNIQUES, the FLOW DIAGRAM TECHNIQUE for exploring the meaning in a text, heuristics for eliciting and displaying the STRUCTURES OF MEANING, alogorithms for developing personally meaningful TAXONOMIES OF PURPOSES, Kelly REPERTORY GRID TECHNIQUES, INTERACTIVE COMPUTER PROGRAMMES, for structuring learning conversations with oneself, are some of the techniques used to articulate, intensify and control these learning-to-learn experiences. An Intelligent Learning Software System is used as a learning shell around simulators to aid an in depth a skilled understanding of the task.

Whilst the exploration of any one or more of the skills may be treated as serious habit-changing and competance acquiring exercise in its own right, the courses always include some experience, at least, of three different skills. This allows comparison to be made and analogies to be drawn which focus attention back onto the main integrative theme. Self-organised learning is seen as internalising the learning conversations so that the learner becomes his own tutor.

WORKSHOPS & SEMINARS

INTELLIGENT LEARNING SOFTWARE

COURSES

Workshops and courses are offered to educational, commercial and industrial enterprises. Some of these are available as 'in-company' courses. Recent in-company courses have included:-

Learning-to-Learn for Managers; The Development of Learning Contracts for Trainers; Subjective Judgement in Quality Control; Creativity for R & D staff; Social Skills for Bankers; Learning Conversations for Teachers; The Self-Organised Learning of Languages, at Self-Organised-Learning approach for Supervisory Effectiveness in the Post Office. The development of the skills of a Learning Coach for 'on the job' Learning Conversations, and Learning Conversations as a methodology for Educational Psychologists.

C.S.H.L. SUITES OF PROGRAMS : INTELLIGENT LEARNING SOFTWARE

These programs are designed, primarily, as aids to be used in raising awareness of learning processes; but each of them can also be used as tools for more general research and investigation. Ten of the programs are based on the Repertory Grid which was originally invented by George Kelly and has been used and elaborated upon to develop a personal learning technology within which individuals, pairs and groups can be enabled to increase their capacity for personal understanding, communication and learning. For those unfamiliar with Repertory Grid techniques, lists of publications on this topic are available from CSHL.

'FOCUS', 'TRIGRID', 'REFLECT' and 'PERCEIVE AND EVALUATE' are all concerned with the analysis and reflective display of individual grids. 'PEGASUS DOUBLE-DEMON' uses the computer to conversaionally elicit a grid with simultaneous analysis and comment back to the user.

'CHANGE GRID' calculates and displays the differences between a series of grids elicitied from one person over a period of time.

'INTERACTIVE PAIRS' and 'EXCHANGE AND CONVERSE' compare grids on the same topic from two people; they are designed to articulate conversation understanding.

'SOCIO-GRIDS AND SOCIO-NET' and 'POOL, REFINE AND CONCENSUS FRAME' are ways of moving from individual understanding to the personal understandings of a group, reflecting areas of shared understanding and misunderstanding.

In addition to the micro-computer programs above there are a number of programs which do not involve the Repertory Grid, these include: 'READING-FOR-LEARNING', an interactive analysis of how people read, and conversational excercises to improve the use of reading as a learning skill.

'CHART' is a conversational method of eliciting a persons' view of the cause and effect structure of an area of their experience.

'STRUCTURES OF MEANING', this is an interactive program that enables the user to construct a structure of meaning on the screen with four way scrolling. Copies can be dumped to the printer at any stage.

'PERSONAL THESAURUS', using a content free form of thesaurus the user builds up and negotiates their hierarchical category system of meaning about some topic. This has proved particularily successful for use in learning-to-learn languages.

'CHAT' conversationally elicits Purpose, Strategy, Outcome Criteria and Reviews prospectively defined and retraspectively experienced models of action learning.

'APPRAISAL & FEEDBACK for LEARNING PACKAGE', for Managers, Teachers and Consultants, elicits personal and group criteria specific for each organisation and analyses and interprets appraisal data to maximise learning potential of self development.

Further details are available in a separate suite
of Computer Program Pamphlets.

RESEARCH PROJECTS AND APPLICATIONS

This approach to encouraging the growth of personal learning in individuals and groups is being applied in a growing number of projects. For example:

(a) A junior school has been using this self-organised learning approach for four years with very satisfactory results. A wide variety of paper and pencil techniques suitable for use with 7 to 11 year olds have been refined out of the core techniques.

(b) The ideas for talking the learner back through a record of their behaviour have been built into a computer-based simulator by the Ministry of Defence and the Learning Conversation Methodology is being incorporated into the materials for courses to which this C.A.L simulator is used.

(c) Learning-to-Learn techniques such as Personal Thesaurus and Personal Learning Task Analysis are currently being developed and

evaluated for use in the teaching of English, French and Welsh as second languages.

(d) The technology is being used and developed in a new training programme with a large food processing company.

(e) Special forms of the core techniques enable managers to exchange and negotiate the personal meanings underlying their appriasal of staff so that evaluative standards can be shared and applied more uniformly.

(f) Similar projects have exchanged and negotiated the subjective standards of product quality used in quality assurance schemes.

(g) The 'conversational measuring' techniques are being used in an experimental self-referent evaluation of psychotherapy.
(h) Training courses for young bankers in 'learning-to-learn' are being used to help them more effectively use correspondence courses in acquiring qualificiations.

(i) Techniques for comparing personal meaning are being used to evaluate the effectiveness of an Open University course.

(j) The Learning-to-Learn materials have been used by self-help groups of industrial trainers to acquaint them with the concept of self-organised learning.

(k) A complete system for the personal development of 'Reading as a Learning Skill' includes methods for eliciting a personal purpose taxonomy, a recorder of reading behaviour, flow diagram analysis of texts and structured network descriptions for evaluating reading outcomes. It has been used with students in colleges of higher education. It had very significant long term (two year follow-up) positive influence on their academic performance.

(l) A workbook of 'learning-to-learn' materials 'The Art and Science of Getting a Degree' has been developed and evaluated with groups of undergraduates, teaching staff and industrial trainers.

(m) Conversational Computer-based repertory grid techniques developed by the director, in addition to those already mentioned include: FOCUS, PEGASUS, TRI-GRID, READREC, PERSONAL THESAURUS, STRUCTURES OF MEANING etc. These have been used in a wide variety of courses and personal learning events including Man-Management courses, Social skills training, Quality control training and primary schools.

(n) These techniques have also been applied to enable marketing managers learn to appreciate the personal meaning attributed to products by consumers.

(o) Implementing a System of Learning Conversations for Promoting Self-Organised Learning among Supervisors and Managers in the Post Office.

POST-GRADUATE RESEARCH

The philosophy of self-organised learning, learning-to-learn techniques and a theory of learning conversation is central to all of the centre's research projects. Currently the main areas of research include: Repertory Grid reflective learning technology, reading-to-learn techniques, self-organised learning packages, language learning, learning-to-learn curriculum for junior schools, development of computer software for reflecting on personal experience and behaviour and development of an intelligent learning system.

In addition, the Centre acts as a resource centre for self-organised learning, publishing technical papers and offering workshops and courses to a world-wide network of professionals. It offers postgraduate seminars and consultancy on specific techniques and methods. Finally, facilities are offered for advanced students to apply the CSHL Conversational Research methods within their own 'habit' to qualify for MPhil and PhD degrees in Human Learning.

NOTE

Negotiations are also underway for Certificate and Diploma awards in Self-Organised-Learning.

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