Chapter XIX
A Conversational Framework for Self–Organised Learning:
Modelling Personal Meaning for Effective Action in the World

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ABSTRACT

People learn by making sense of the world for themselves, thereby constructing personal meaning. Effective learners are aware of how they do this and can actively organize this process for themselves. They engage in a reflective conversational process called self-organised-learning (SOL). In western cultures the education system inhibits SOL because it is founded on the outmoded belief that all knowledge is objective and that learners are expected to absorb what is given. Teachers and trainers are expected to treat learners as 'objects' to be manipulated and they are prevented from developing their capacity to learn. They become 'other-organised-learners' and often suffer from life-long learning pathologies, which constrain their growth. This chapter describes conversational techniques for supporting SOL, plus the science and philosophy behind them. The techniques are practiced within a Learning Conversation methodology designed to empower individual, team, and organizational growth, and have been proven effective in many educational and commercial situations. Fundamental changes and a paradigm shift are essential in education policy to enable many more to become life-long self-organised-learners and through their effective activities, transform our cultures. SOL empowers personal skill, competence, and creativity and is of value in tutoring, coaching, team learning, e-learning, and distance learning. SOL has implications for teacher training, management development, and organisational learning.

INTRODUCTION

Action research carried out over 30 years in a wide range of organizations involving individuals and teams has enabled the development of a conversational methodology and technology for enhancing the human capacity to learn. A quantum leap in skill, competence, and creativity can be achieved and this process has been called Self-Organised-Learning (SOL). In this chapter the focus shall be on some of the core components of Self-Organised-Learning and for those who may be interested in applying this approach within their own domains, some of the appropriate SOL resources shall be referred to. Towards the end and where relevant throughout, the unique contributions of Gordon on conversation theory shall be commented on and show how the SOL approach relates to his own; in his own words, ''Sheila and Laurie have added to and independently innovated in their own metaphor directions.'' Those who have been a source of inspiration from within an eclectic cocktail of progressive thinkers from within cybernetics, biology, psychology, quantum physics, and mathematics as well as Eastern and Western philosophy shall be referred to. Finally, how SOL can contribute to and significantly change the world of education shall be briefly commented on.

Several divergent roots become unified within Self-Organised-Learning. We shall specify some of these.

Systems thinking, emergent biology, ecology, and gestalt psychology as well as the Tao imply a shift in perspective from parts to the whole. They give emphasis to relationships and patterns of organization within an open system and to the balance of flow and change. Again, re-entrant feedback and complex networks within living matter capable of autopoeisis lead ultimately to self-organisation and together with chaos and complexity have formed the foundations of a new thermodynamics of open living systems. It is extrapolated that such patterns of embodiment in all living matter are also crucial characteristics of human learning. Furthermore, complex patterns of relationships in living systems are continually being transformed, increasing diversity and creativity and this is seen as fundamental to human learning. Self-organised-learning involves constantly seeking for novelty within which perception, emotion, cognition, language, meaning, behaviour, and self-generated feedback all play a part. The emerging awareness and consciousness allows us to differentiate our world, build our personal constructs and structures of meaning which become the basis of our actions. Within this psychological domain, *a process of knowing*, a growing awareness of our inner and outer world empowers conscious control, self-regulation, and Self-Organised-Learning.

The human capacity for abstract thought empowers the facility for *modeling our world* whereby personal models are constructed and reconstructed and this allows us as self-organised-learners to grow our freedom, transform ourselves and the world we inhabit. SOL-ers and networks of SOL-ers become learning entities or *conversational individuals* (C-indis) capable of bootstrapping their *capacity to learn*. This view of human learning may sound utopian but those individuals and organisations that have practised SOL have achieved some remarkable and occasionally unexpected outcomes. The problem is that most of education does not approach learning in this way and people early on become trapped within a closed system of beliefs and values, restricting their personal experimentation. Consequently, they develop an ever-diminishing and fixed view of their own capabilities as learners and of their possible futures. They become imprisoned within habitual modes of learning, sometimes referred to as learning styles, and their beliefs and values become frozen and apparently immutable to change. On the whole, the systems of education as well as the learning technologies fail to take account of self-organisation in learning. This results in a pathology of learning and a deficit of learning potential in the cultures.

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