

Constructing 'Resourceful or Mutually Enabling' Communities:  
Putting a New (Dialogical) Practice into Our Practices

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# Constructing ‘Resourceful or Mutually Enabling’ Communities: Putting a New (Dialogical) Practice into Our Practices

## ABSTRACT

The whole idea of being a “participant,” of being an involved actor as distinct from being an “external observer” standing over against or apart from what one is learning about or researching into, is crucial in everything that follows below. It leads us to a focus on actual practices and activities in an everyday context, rather than on theories and talk in classrooms, seminar rooms, and conference halls. As academics, the world of practice, however, is not very familiar to us. We must re-teach ourselves to think in relational rather than atomistic-corpuseular (Newtonian) terms. A whole new way of being in the world is involved. Instead of taking the thoughts or theories of individuals as an original source of new activities in our lives, it involves a focus on the primacy of our living, spontaneously responsive reactions to the others and othernesses around us. Such a change in stance – from an uninvolved, outsider’s view of a scene to an insider’s sense of their position, their relational-involvement, within a situation – changes how we think and talk about many notions of importance to us in our discussions of the meaning of learning. For instance: thinking becomes inner dialogue (rather than calculation); understanding becomes a relationally-responsive bodily activity (rather than a representational-referential one in our minds); knowledge becomes a matter of ‘knowing one’s way about’, as in knowing what to do next (rather than the accurate picturing of a state of affairs); while communication becomes more a matter of pointing out aspects of one’s surroundings (rather than the giving of decontextualized information). In particular, though, a focus on our spontaneous responsiveness in participatory contexts, suggests that learning is something we do incidentally, spontaneously, without effort (rather than self-consciously, effortfully, in classrooms). Indeed, it suggests that any explicit teaching we might do must rely on what is learned easily and spontaneously, as long as the appropriate surrounding conditions are in place. In short, it suggests that teaching can best be done through the use of living, concrete examples (rather than through the enunciation of abstract rules or general principles). Indeed, rather than ‘putting a theory’ into practice, effective learning (in which we learn how to learn) is achieved by inserting both into our lives and into our more institutionalized practices, a new kind of dialogically reflective practice. This approach is illustrated by material from the Swedish “Learning Regions” project.

“I conceive of schools and preschools as serving a renewed function in our changing societies. This entails building school cultures that operate as mutual communities of learners, involved jointly in solving problems with all contributing to the process of educating one another” (Bruner, 1996, pp.81-82).

“... what [these others] did was outside my skin. But whatever it was that I learned, my learning happened within my experiential sequence of what these important others... did” (Bateson, 1979, p.24).

“The ‘otherness’ which enters us makes us other” (Steiner, 1989, p.188).

“To those who wish and know how to think participatively\* [see next quote below], it seems that philosophy, which ought to resolve ultimate problems... fails to speak of what it ought to speak.

Even though its propositions have a certain validity, they are incapable of determining an answerable act/deed and the world in which it is actually and answerably performed once and only once" (Bakhtin, 1993, p.19).

“\*That is, those who know how not to detach their performed act from its product, but rather how to relate both of them to the unitary and unique context of life and seek to determine them in that context as an indivisible unity” (footnote to the above quote, Bakhtin, 1993, p.19).

“A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connections’” (Wittgenstein, 1953, no.122).

“Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice. Our rules leave loopholes open, and the practice has to speak for itself” (Wittgenstein, 1969, no.144).

“For more clearly... in my experience of others than in my experience of speech or the perceived world, I inevitably grasp my body as a spontaneity which teaches me what I could not know in any other way except through it ... It [my body] must teach me to comprehend what no constituting consciousness can know – my involvement in a ‘pre-constituted’ world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, pp.93-95).

“Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.88).

“Learning is in urgent need to be ‘undefined’,” is one of the orienting statements for this symposium. “There is a need to rethink research in light of the ‘undefinition’ of learning beyond the boundaries of instructional processes,” is another. Toward the aim implied in these statements, I want in what follows to explore – and to put into dialogue with each other, so to speak – the work of a group of philosophers and other writers on language and life. Mainly, I will draw from Wittgenstein, Voloshinov, Bakhtin, and Merleau-Ponty, who all in their own different ways, focus on the primacy of our living, spontaneously responsive reactions to the others and othernesses around us, rather than taking the thoughts or theories of individuals as an original source of new activities in our lives. As Wittgenstein (1980) puts it: “The origin and the primitive form of the language game is,” he says, “a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language - I want to say - is refinement, ‘in the beginning was the deed’ (quoting Goethe)” (p.31). Whilst elsewhere he remarks: “Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead, is not the same. All our reactions are different” (1953, no.284). Rather than on what is supposed as occurring in some hidden way within us, so that we must approach it indirectly, in terms of hypotheses and theories, this focus on our spontaneous, living, differential responsiveness to the otherness around us, and on our immediate, ‘inner’, felt experience of it, is crucial. For there is something very special in people’s living, bodily presence to each other that is not properly acknowledged in our current modernist, mechanistic ways of making sense of our world.

As Merleau-Ponty (1968) puts it in his The Visible and the Invisible: “In a sense, if we were to make completely explicit the architectonics of the human body, its ontological framework, and how it sees itself and hears itself, we would see that the structure of its mute world is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it. Already our existence as seers (that is, we said, as beings who turn the world back upon itself and who pass over to the other side, and who catch sight of one another, who see one another with eyes) and especially

our existence as sonorous beings for others and for ourselves contain everything required for there to be speech from the one to the other, speech about the world. And, in a sense, to understand a phrase is nothing else than to fully welcome it in its sonorous being, or, as we put it so well, to *hear what it says (l'entendre)*. The meaning is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of “copy reality” spread over the sound: it is the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain; it is given with the words for those who have ears to hear” (p.155). In what follows below, I shall explore the special nature of our spontaneous, bodily responsiveness to events in our surroundings, and the many implications it has for how we must re-think the process of learning in our lives. Rather than merely causal or rational, our relations to our surroundings are, I shall argue, dialogically-structured.

This, as we shall see, changes completely the way in which we make sense of many terms of importance to us in our conduct of our daily human affairs. In particular, such terms as learning, understanding, knowing, communicating, meaning, organizing, etc. – they all will have to be used in a wholly new way; or, to put it differently, they will all have to be used in a very old, participative manner, a manner which in the past was thought of as ‘primitive’ (Levy-Bruhl, 1926).

## **Our Cartesian Heritage: God-Ideas and Devil-Ideas**

Detailed attention to the quality of our living, spontaneous, bodily reactions is unusual. In modern times, we have grown up much more with the idea of “putting theories into practice,” with the idea that certain academic and intellectual people are ‘mind’ workers, while others do bodily work. Thus it seems OK for mind workers to sit in seminar rooms and conference halls (as we are now), or CEO’s to sit cherry-wood paneled offices, and rhetorically justify the worth of their mere talk by claiming that ultimately – as long as they observe certain empirical methods of testing and other standards of truthfulness – their talk will have its payoff in our practices. The fact that it takes place in a place and time quite divorced from our actual practices is not considered important. Indeed, so strong is the assumption that our bodies are only animated by our minds, that stories in which our bodies are ‘snatched’ by other alien and free-floating minds is a powerful fantasy for us (e.g., Stephen King’s Tommyknockers). We have inherited this sharp division between mind and body from Descartes (1986), whose declared goal in his Meditations was to establish the claim that the soul, or the self, is solely and purely “a thing which thinks” (p.19). But what about our bodies? What did Descartes think of them? Well, after beginning his exploration by asking himself the question: “What is a man?,” he continues: “... the first thought to come to mind was that I had a face, hands, arms and the whole mechanical structure that can be seen in a corpse, and which I called a body... [Where] a body can be perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell, and can be moved in various ways, not by itself but by whatever comes into contact with it. For, according to my judgment, the power of self-movement, like the power of sensation or of thought, was quite foreign to the nature of the body...” (p.17).

We are still in the thrall of (Wittgenstein would say “bewitched” by) this story, and in a moment I want to suggest that the body that Descartes talks of here is, so to say, “the observed or the seen body,” the body as known from the outside, not “the felt or the lived body” as known to us from within our living of our lives together. For I want to explore the strange and surprisingly

extensive consequences of the fact that as living, embodied beings, we cannot help but be spontaneously responsive to events occurring around us. And as one consequence of this, in the moments of contact between ourselves and the others around us, our actions cease to be wholly our own; we begin to act jointly, as in a dance or suchlike – what I do is responsively shaped by what you are doing in reacting to me. But before I leave Descartes behind completely, I want to draw attention to more than the fact that he ignores our spontaneous bodily activities, I want also to point to how he leads us (by the same token) to disregard the importance of our ordinary, everyday ways of talking (which depend on our bodily responsiveness to each other too) – the ways of talking that he himself relies upon to mislead us in his arguments.

His argument from the example of a piece of wax – which prior to its melting is known in terms of certain of its sensed features, but which is still the same wax even when it has melted and exhibits a whole different set of such features – is well-known. From it, he concludes that “... the perception I have of it is a case not of vision or touch or imagination... but of mental scrutiny... But as I reach this conclusion I am amazed at how weak and prone to error my mind is... I am almost tricked by ordinary ways of talking” (p.21). Indeed, he continues this line of thought thus: “... if I just look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I judge that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgement which is in my mind” (p.21).

Now I do not have the space here to go into the way in which we have been duped by Descartes’s rhetoric here. Bernard Williams (1986) examines this in his introduction to a recent edition of the *Meditations*. “We must not forget that the work is a carefully designed whole, of great literary cunning...” he remarks (p.x). “Its end,” he says, “lies in its beginning” (p.x) – that Descartes suggests in the very first sentence of the book, that we must lay aside everything and anything that we can doubt. “But no one ordinarily supposes that the rational way to start on these things is to throw away or lay aside all the information one thinks one already has... (p.xi). But because Descartes is concerned with certain truth and nothing else, and we follow him because we unquestionably believe it to be an absolute good, we forget that in so doing we have allowed his (and our) arguments to become wholly detached from all our practices. Why? Because, I suggest, we are still tempted to think in terms of God- and Devil-ideas: we seem to take it for granted, for instance, that a single, logical, systematic, theoretical order of connectedness is good, and that if we had it, then (as Descartes in fact put it), we could “make ourselves masters and possessors of nature,” while to continue to live in chaos and disorder is bad.

Indeed, with respect to learning, there are a number of seemingly unquestionable commonplaces about ‘powerful goods’ for learning, which follow from Descartes’s ignoring of our bodily responsiveness to our surroundings. Unquestionable God-ideas, with the power to influence learning are: the importance of principles, of repetition, of practice makes perfect; there is also the idea of clarity and simplicity, of logical frameworks and of single, simple, orders of connectedness; of the moment of insight, of individual style and talent, of events in the head; of the importance of logical structure, of system, of the one-way transmission of information, of

testing and giving the right answers to questions; while true learning is independent of who we are, of our identity. All these God-ideas will need re-thinking.

I take this way of stating the issue – in terms of God-ideas and Devil-ideas – seriously and formulate it in these terms under the influence of a number of sources: One is Richard Webster's (1996) book Why Freud was Wrong. Webster first notes Jung's (1963) comment on Freud's motive for theorizing as he did: "In place of the jealous God he had lost, he had substituted another compelling image, that of sexuality. It was no less insistent, exacting, domineering, threatening and morally ambivalent than the original one..." (p.179, quoted in Webster, 1996, p.379). He then goes on to note that Jung himself, "instead of dismissing religion as part of the problem, ...saw it as a potential solution and as a source of healing" (pp.386-387). Indeed, cast into an intellectual environment of rationalistic positivism that is ostensibly hostile to all forms of religious belief, many western intellectuals still feel themselves under, Webster suggests, "a profound psychological compulsion to immerse themselves once more in belief" (p.384). Rorty (1980, 1989) too notes this, and wants to try and cure us of our compulsive need to, as he puts it, "eternalize" or "divinize" the ideology of the day in our quest for a basis for our actions somewhere "beyond history and institutions" (p.198). While a final influence is again Wittgenstein. As he remarks about the baleful influence of theories in our attempts to understand human affairs more... : "we are under the illusion that what is sublime, what is essential, about our investigation consists in grasping one comprehensive essence (1981, no.444). A major example of such a belief at the moment, is the belief in the behavioral sciences that once we know the rules being followed by, or being used in some other way, by social actors in structuring their behavior, then we will then be able to explain all that they do (see Giddens, 1979, for an extensive account of this view of our social practices).

How else might we understand human activities and learning, if not in this manner? As Bateson (1979) remarks about a whole set of such empty explanations, "invoking a principle inside one component is in fact the error that is made in every one of these cases" (p.98). If we are ever to learn anything genuinely new, it is not explanation in terms of a tautological order of necessary relations devised by ourselves that will help us. We feel compelled to search for rules or principles, but even if we find any, statements of rules or principles lie before us "dead on the page", so to speak. To be of practical help to us, we must 'interpret' them, and all our puzzles then begin again. As all the writers mentioned above point out, something new comes to us only when an other 'calls out' a response from us that we were not able ourselves to call out from ourselves<sup>1</sup>.

## **Collaborative Learning: Bruner's Account of 'Enabling Communities'**

Toward the end of this paper, I will outline in more detail the "Learning Regions" project in Sweden (to which I have an association), and the role of the "dialogue conferences" they

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<sup>1</sup>. "A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise for itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths" (Bakhtin,1986, p.7).

involve (Shotter and Gustavsen, 1999). But here, by way of further scene-setting, I would like to explore a number of issues connected with collaborative learning projects, with 'enabling communities', as Bruner (1996) presents them in his recent book, The Culture of Education. Crucial to them, as I have already noted in the epigraph quote above, is the absence of the one-way transmission of information, of teachers as experts. As he sees it, the educational task has now changed. In the context of our continually developing and changing cultures, in which all fixities and stabilities are now of a dynamic and often only momentary kind, we now "need desperately to look more closely at what we mean by an 'enabling' culture, particularly that part of the enabling community represented by its schools" (p.77). And as already mentioned, he goes on to conceive of schools "as serving a renewed function within our changing societies... [we must build] school cultures that operate as mutual communities of learners, involved jointly in solving problems with all contributing to the process of educating one another... [With schools becoming] centers for the cultivation of a new awareness about what it is like living in a modern society" (pp.81-82) – where, as it is now often remarked, we can no longer train when young for a lifetime's career, but must think of 're-inventing' ourselves during our working lives, two or three times at least.

But how does Bruner arrive at this renewed view of our educational institutions? He begins with the by now familiar social constructionist claim, that "the 'reality' we impute to the 'worlds' we inhabit is a constructed one" (p.19), in which our use of words plays a crucial part. This leads him on to the claim that, rather than thought giving rise to action, "'thought' as it is usually discussed may be little more than a way of talking and conversing about something we cannot observe... a way of talking that functions to give 'thought' some form that is more visible, more audible, more referable, and more negotiable" (p.108). This results in him assuming, as we have already assumed above, that our practices are primary. But if this is so, what becomes of our idea that education is to do with the growth or cultivation of pupils' minds?

Instead of still taking it that our primary task is that of providing yet, but now a more complex and up-to-date version of the world around us, Bruner turns our attention back on ourselves, toward our own social powers of construction. As he sees it, schools should become "a place for the praxis (rather than the proclamation) of cultural mutuality – which means an increase in the awareness that children have of what they are doing, how they are doing it, and why" (p.82). In other words, the growth of mind becomes for Bruner, the growth of mindful action, a growth of the ability to act self-consciously. As he puts it, "the process of becoming aware of practice... is an antidote to mindlessness. And mindlessness is one of the major impediments to change" (p.79).

But how is such an awareness cultivated? In contrasting the "impoverished" communicative negotiations of chimpanzee pairs with human mother-child negotiation, Bruner describes an example of, as he puts it, "mother-child 'book reading', where the mother was engaged in teaching her son, Jonathan, the names of things pictured on the pages of the book" (p.182). In the example, "as soon as Jonathan could give a passably correct label in reply to his mother's standard 'What's that?' question, she would begin a next 'And what's the X doing?' routine. She was elaborating the name given to the object at the focus of their joint attention into a wider system of symbols... Indeed, Jonathan's mother even used a distinctive intonation pattern... reverting to the rising intonation she used whenever entering new intersubjective

territory” (p.182). In other words, this is clearly not a process in which one person is observing another from a distance, and only later providing them with a theoretical formulation of the results of their observations to ponder over, cognitively. The two people are in an immediate, living, embodied, responsive contact with each other’s activities. They are not just coordinating their activities cognitively, but are interrelating them in what Bakhtin (1986) calls a dialogical fashion.

I will turn to the very special nature of dialogically-structured phenomena in more detail below. Here it will be sufficient to mention just one, among the many strange characteristics of such phenomena. For it is a characteristic that Bruner feels to be a major tenet, among the nine he sets out, as guides to his (psycho-cultural) approach to education – I will give it its name in a moment. Under the umbrella of the question: “What bonus or increment of knowing follows from combining information from two or more sources” (Bateson, 1979, p.77), Bateson explores such phenomena as binocular vision, and beats and Moiré patterns. I will explore the case of binocular vision and its relation to dialogically-structured phenomena further below. Let me here turn to what Bateson has to say about beats and Moiré patterns. As is well-known, the combination of two rhythmic patterns will generate a third – two sounds of different frequencies will create beats (a rhythm in time), and two rhythmic spatial patterns (two metal gratings, say) superimposed will create a Moiré pattern (a rhythm in space). If I was producing one rhythmic pattern in my activities, and you were producing another in your’s (with mine being, roughly, in response to your’s, and your’s being, roughly, in response to mine, so that both your’s and mine were ‘in the same ball park’, so to speak), then the third pattern produced would be neither your’s nor mine but our’s. However, because neither of us can have a sense of directly shaping its production in our actions, it appears to us as an ‘it’, as a third something existing independently of either of us as individuals<sup>2</sup>. Such third things, such ‘its’, exist only in, as Bruner calls it, “intersubjective territory.”

Such ‘its’– Bruner also calls them “works” or “oeuvres” – play an important part in Bruner’s “psycho-cultural” approach to education. He discusses them under the heading of his “externalization tenet” (pp.22-29). He sees them as serving many functions. For instance: “‘It’ takes over our attention as something that, in its own right, needs [something]... ‘It’ relieves us in some measure from the always difficult task of ‘thinking about our own thoughts’... ‘It’ embodies our thoughts and intentions in a form more accessible to reflective efforts” (p.23), and so on. Indeed, what is especially important in people’s living, responsive, involvements with each other, is the fact that they find the living ‘Its’ they create between them exert moral obligations on them in some way – which leads Bakhtin (1986) to talk of such ‘its’ as superaddressees (p.126). As Bruner points out, “much of what is involved in being a member of a culture is doing what the ‘things’ [the ‘its’] around you require” (p.151). Rather than our surroundings being seen as a neutral and inert, from within our human involvements with the others around us, they must be seen as providing us with a dynamic, living context with its our requirements, invitations, offerings, and affordings. In short, its motivations<sup>3</sup>. And it is in the

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<sup>2</sup>. See the account in Shotter (1984, pp. 100-105) on the strange characteristics of “joint action.”

<sup>3</sup>. Vygotsky (1986) comments in this respect, in discussing “the last step” in his analysis of the development of higher mental processes: “Thought is not the superior authority in this process. Thought is not begotten by thought; it is engendered by motivation, i.e., by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency, which holds the answer to the last ‘why’ in the analysis of thinking” (p.252).



invention for ourselves of new 'its' to 'call out' from us new actions, that we can motivate change our cultural practices – perhaps sufficiently extensively to elaborate them everywhere, not just in schools – into the self-developing practices of an “enabling community.” I will return to these issues at the end of this article, where I will discuss the Swedish “Learning Regions” project.

### **The Primordial Scene of Social Life: Our Spontaneously Responsive, Bodily Activity**

With all the above scene-setting in place, I would now like to return to the focus I promised above on the primacy of our living, spontaneously responsive reactions to the others and othernesses around us. Our living bodily presence to each other is of crucial importance in education. For, as living, embodied beings (as 'open' systems) we cannot help but be spontaneously responsive to events occurring around us. We attend to events that we ourselves, so to speak, 'make' – as we comprehensively attend to a location in our surroundings with our eyes, ears, turnings of the body, and so on – as well as those that just happen, that spontaneously 'call' us to attend to them. Crucial amongst these latter, are those specially arranged by others around us, aimed at training us to respond to aspects of our surroundings as they do already. As a result of us being spontaneously responsive in this way, strange things happen to and within us. Not only is there a rich and complex intertwining of our own outgoing responsive activities with those coming into us from our surroundings, but within this intricate intertwining, a 'space' with a 'depth' (of human possibilities) to it is created around us. And as we have seen above, at the point of contact between two or more different forms of life with each other, yet another (collective) third form of life emerges, a form of life with its own unique, horizon-bound environment, i.e., a world, within which at that moment I find myself immersed. But how are the stable knowings and understandings that seem to guide us in our practical doings possible in the midst of all this fluidity? For they seem to involve the creative combining of two or more sources of activity to produce, not simply a merged or averaged activity, but a distinct otherness located 'out there', a unitary whole with its own 'inner' nature, a positioned source of activity with its own unique 'style' of life.

I am climbing a rock. I visually scan over the scene before me. My two eyes return to, and convergently focus on, the same rock face, up there, again and again, as well as on possible hand holds on my climb up to it from where I now stand. But in doing this, it is not a matter of me simply integrating a sequence of separate stimuli (static pictures) provided me by a sequence of glimpses, but of me finding ways within the continuous flux of spontaneously responsive experience to orient myself in relation my surroundings by focusing all (or a number) of my sensory channels on certain invariances or stabilities within that flux to which I can return time and time again. I see what I touch and touch what I see, and hear the rasping sound of my fingers slipping on the rock as issuing from the point at which I can see them touching it. As Gibson (1979) points out: “Vision is a whole perceptual system, not a channel of sense. One sees the environment not with the eyes but with the eyes-in-the-head-on-a-body-resting-on-the-ground” (p.205). And, we might add, similarly for the auditory system: it is not an isolated channel of sense either. One hears one's environment not with the ears, but with the ears-in-the-head-on-a-body-resting-on-the-ground-facing-in-a-certain-direction; thus the two systems (visual and

auditory) are not in fact physically separable from each other, but reciprocally implicated in each other's operation.

Similar to my creative discovery of a set of stable 'places' in terms of which to orient myself in my climb up a rock face, so the otherness of the other is made available to me in the same way, i.e., in the constancies discoverable in the variations between my many outgoing expressions addressed to them, and all the incoming responses from them addressed to me. They, i.e., their 'style' of being, is present to me in the differences between my expressions and their responses to them, as I am present to them in the same way. But how can we make sense of such a creative process as this, in which a multidimensional, unitary whole is created to accommodate, so to speak, a set of otherwise unrelated fragments? Ten considerations (at least) are, I think, relevant:

1) Dialogically-structured events: One consideration that is crucial to the approach I shall take, is Bakhtin's (1981, 1984, 1986) claim that our living relations to the others and othernesses around us are structured neither in cause and effect terms, nor in terms of sign to meaning, but dialogically, i.e., in relationally-responsive terms, in terms of a circumstance or situation 'calling for' or 'motivating' a response from us. As he puts it with respect to our verbal utterances: "Language lives only in the dialogical interaction of those who make use of it...Dialogic relationships are reducible neither to logical relationships nor to relationships oriented semantically toward their referential object, [these] relationships in and of themselves [are] devoid of any dialogical element. They must clothe themselves in discourse, become utterances, become positions of various subjects expressed in discourse, in order that dialogic relations might arise among them. 'Life is good', 'Life is not good'. We have before us two judgments... Between these two judgements there exists a specific logical relation: one is the negation of the other. But between them there are not and cannot be any dialogic relationships; they do not argue with each other in any way.... Both these judgments must be embodied, if a dialogic relationship is to arise between them and toward them" (p.183). Thus, when these two judgments are expressed in two utterances by two different individuals, one in response to the other, then they can give rise to disagreement, to contradiction, to controversy, and so on; then they are constitutive of one or another kind of relationship between the people concerned. Indeed, more than that, as we shall see, a unified world containing the two individuals concerned also begins to come into existence, a world able to function as a context in which such a disagreement, contradiction, or controversy can make sense.

2) A third realm of activity that is neither behavior nor action: The dialogical is thus born in the space between the living, bodily expressions of one individual and the spontaneous bodily responses to them by an other. Rather than occurring in an instant, however, such dialogically-structured activity develops over time. In being neither simply caused by an external (stimulus) event (behavior), nor due to the reasons or motives of an individual (action), it falls into a special, third category of activity, exhibiting an intertwined, multidimensional complexity. Its unfolding 'shape' owes its character to its continually changing responsive relations to its surroundings as people sequentially 'answer' spontaneously to the 'calls' coming to them in turn from within their different involvements with their surroundings.

3) Our ineradicable involvement with our surroundings: We are always involved in the world around us in one way or another. Not to be involved, not to be oriented toward our surroundings, but to be totally disconnected from them, is not, as living beings, an option for us.

4) Meaning is present in the social act before any conscious awareness of meaning occurs: Given that whatever an individual does in response to their surroundings, is both 'expressive' of their attitude or orientation to them, as well as 'calling out' an other's response. The relation of such "expression-summoned bodily responsiveness," if we can call it that, to us later being able to express meanings to each other, is well expressed by Mead (1934). He notes that: "The mechanism of meaning is...present in the social act before the emergence of consciousness or awareness of meaning occurs. The act or adjustive response of the second organism gives to the gesture of the first organism the meaning it has" (pp 77-78). 3). In other words, long before anything occurs in our heads, in our conscious experience, we can find in the very structure of our responsive bodily activities, the precursors or prototypes for what later we shall talk of in mental or cognitive terms.

5) The joint production of enthymemic structures: This gives rise to another consideration of great importance – although it may seem very strange indeed to bring it in at this point. It is the importance of the enthymeme or enthymemic structures. In rhetoric, an enthymeme – like the two utterances mentioned above: 'Life is good' and 'Life is bad' – consists in only two propositions, and lacks the 'middle term' which joins them; if the two utterances are to be accepted as jointly making sense, then the middle term (the contextualizing world) must be implicitly and creatively supplied by all those involved. Put otherwise, an enthymeme or enthymematic structure occurs when a speaker or performer says or does something that an other who witnesses it responds to in such a way that both performer and audience agree to the resulting joint outcome (Bitzer, 1959). I mention the importance of enthymemic structures in the light of the following comment by Voloshinov (1987): "Whatever kind it be, the behavioral utterance always joins the participants in the situation together as co-participants who know, understand, and evaluate the situation in a like manner.... Thus, the extraverbal situation is far from being merely the external cause of an utterance – it does not operate on the utterance from the outside, as if it were a mechanical force. Rather, the situation enters into the utterance as an essential constitutive part of the structure of its import. Consequently, a behavioral utterance as a meaningful whole is comprised of two parts: (1) the part realized or actualized in words and (2) the assumed part. On this basis, the behavior utterance can be liken to an enthymeme" (p.100)<sup>4</sup>.

6) Unities of unmerged consciousnesses: But how are the 'middle terms' of enthymemes created? This question leads me on to a fourth consideration: As we have seen, dialogically structured, living activity cannot be described in merely causal terms, nor can it be understood logically or rationally, in terms of people's reasons for so acting. It seems to be an utterly distinct, and very strange third kind of activity, in which the individual activities involved, although they may be very different from each other, nonetheless form, for a moment, a single, true unity of internally related parts. Like the complex unity produced in the stranding and intertwining of the different instruments in an orchestra playing a symphony; with each playing

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<sup>4</sup>. Here is a precise example of the previous point – that we can find in the very structure of our responsive bodily activities, the precursors or prototypes for what later we shall talk of in mental or cognitive terms.

its own part in a responsive relation to all the others playing their part, a dialogically-structured unity is, as Bakhtin (1984) oxymoronically puts it, “a unity of unmerged consciousnesses or voices.”

7) The binocular as an exemplar of an unmerged unity of sensory sources: But how can a unity be formed from unmerged constituents. Shouldn't we more properly call it a mixture or an amalgam? Like splitting the atom, a contradiction in terms would seem to be involved. What could a living unity of unmerged entities or activities be like? As I mentioned above, Bateson (1979), draws on this example to point out the advantages of having two (or more) separate sources of information bearing on the same location out in our surroundings. He mentions two advantages: one is that we are able to achieve better visual resolution at edges and contrasts, i.e., to be more sensitive to change. But the second is even more important. From the spontaneous intertwining of the two monocular views from our two eyes, rather than a blurred and averaged, and still two-dimensional view, we become the beneficiaries of a three dimensional, binocular view of the scene before us. Indeed, from the slight variations between the different views from the two eyes, besides a left-right and an up-down dimension of relation between ourselves and our surroundings, a third inner or relational-dimension of near and far emerges. From the point at which our two eyes achieve a clear, focused, convergence, we gain a sense of depth. And this, as Bateson points out, is a dimension of a quite different logical type to the (dead) objective, external dimensions in terms of which grasp the character of our surroundings independently of ourselves. It is an inner living relationship to our surroundings which provides us, personally, with a more refined orientation toward them. The different arrival time of sounds at our left and right ears operates in the same way, to give us, not a merged echo effect, but the directionality of a sound.

We may take these examples as paradigms for what can happen when two separate activities intertwine in a living, dialogically-structured relation to each other: further inner dimensions of relationship and connection, leading to more refined orientation to our surroundings, are produced. In short, our sensitivities to subtle variations in certain spheres of involvement – in painting (colors, shapes, shades, balances, etc.), in numbers (repetitive patterns, relations in an array, etc.), in skiing and sailing (a sensitivity to slight variations in conditions), and so on – increase. Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1964) also takes binocular vision as a paradigm for the special kind of creative, qualitative synthesis produced by our living bodies: “We pass from double vision to the single object, not through an inspection of the mind, but when the two eyes cease to function each on its own account and are used as a single organ by one single gaze. It is not the epistemological subject who brings about the synthesis, but the body...” (1962, p.232). Indeed, as I have already noted above, what is so difficult to accept with respect to such joint, dialogically-structured, activities, is that we as individuals have no inner sense of responsibility for them.

8) Seeing connections: This distinct third sphere of dialogically-structured activity – which is not individual action, nor mere externally caused behavior – involves a special kind of nonrepresentational, sensuous, embodied form of understanding which is constitutive of people's social and personal identities. It is constitutive of them as a certain kind of person. I have called it a relationally-responsive form, to contrast it with the representational-referential form of understanding more familiar to us in our current philosophical discussions of knowledge and

understanding. It consist in, as Wittgenstein (1953) puts it, ““seeing connections”” (no.122). We might call it an (inner) orientational kind of knowing. For, once we ‘see’ the world around us in this way, we see more than merely inert objects before us; we see in terms of a whole set of spontaneously occurring, bodily reactions and anticipatory responses, a whole set of ‘calls’ to which we feel answerable in a certain way. It is a kind of spontaneous knowing manifested in our practical activities, again as Wittgenstein (1953) puts it, in terms of us knowing our “way about” (no.123), in terms of us feeling ‘at home’ in our surroundings. It is thus a kind of knowing that is prior to and determines all the other ways of knowing available to us.

9) The primordial ‘stuff’ of knowledge: But the intertwining in which we are interested occurs among more than just two channels from the same sensory realm. But all my senses are at work in giving me around me a unified world. Applying what we have learned from the synthesis binocular vision to the problem of the unity of our senses, Merleau-Ponty (1962) remarks: “It cannot be understood in terms of their subsumption under a primary consciousness, but of their never ending integration into one knowing organism. The intersensory object is to the visual object what the visual object is to the monocular images of double vision, and the senses interact in perception as the two eyes collaborate in vision (pp.233-234). Thus in our primordial, perceptual relations to our surroundings, “... we do not think the object and we do not think ourselves as thinking it, we are given over to the object and we merge into this body which is better informed than we are about the world, and about the motives we have and the means at our disposal for synthesizing it” (p.238). Thus perception is, Merleau-Ponty concludes, “a non-thetic [i.e., non-positing], pre-objective, pre-conscious experience. Let us therefore say, provisionally that there is a merely possible stuff of knowledge. From every point in the primordial field intentions move outwards, vacant and yet determinate; in realizing these intentions, analysis will arrive at the object of science, at sensation as a private phenomenon, and at the pure subject which posits both. These three terminal concepts are no nearer on the horizon of primordial experience. It is in the experience of the thing that the reflective ideal of positing thought will have its basis. Hence reflection does itself not grasp its full significance unless it refers to the unreflective fund of experience which it presupposes, upon which it draws, and which constitutes for it a kind of original past, a past which has never been present” (p.242)<sup>5</sup> .

10) The further specification of a circumstance by those involved within it: In short, activities in this third, primordial sphere lack specificity. They are a complex mixture of many different kinds of influences. This makes it very difficult for us to characterize their nature: they have neither a fully orderly nor a fully disorderly structure, neither a completely stable nor an easily changed organization, neither a fully subjective nor fully objective character. Indeed, it is precisely their lack of any pre-determined order, and thus their openness to being specified or determined by those involved in them, in practice – while usually remaining quite unaware of having done so – that is their central defining feature. It is precisely this that makes this sphere of activity so interesting. It is interesting for how it illustrates the way in which, as Merleau-Ponty

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<sup>5</sup>: Merleau-Ponty (1968) continues this investigation in The Visible and the Invisible: “Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world. It is a marvel too little noticed that every movement of my eyes -- even more, every displacement of my body -- has its place in the same visible universe that I itemize and explore with them, as, conversely, every vision takes place somewhere in the tactile space. There is double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one. The two parts are total parts and yet are not superposable” (p.134).

(1962) puts it: “It is my body which gives significance not only to the natural object, but also to cultural objects like words,” (p.235). Indeed, to repeat a segment already quoted above, the meaning of an utterance as we voice it “is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of “copy reality” spread over the sound: it is the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain; it is given with the words for those who have ears to hear” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.155). As we voice and otherwise body forth our utterances, there in the subtle details of the ‘shape’ of the unfolding flow of our expression, visible for all to see and audible for all to hear, are our moment-by-moment evaluations of ‘our inner worlds’.

These ten considerations then, bring out something of what is so very special in our embedding within what we now might call a “responsive order” (Gendlin, 1997). New relations that matter to us, new features requiring our evaluative judgments, new dimensions that both offer us certain opportunities for action while also exerting certain calls upon us to which we must respond, are continually being created, unnoticed, in our dialogically-structured encounters with the others and othernesses around us. Although we usually remain unaware of always being situated within such a dialogically structured space, although the created sense of a ‘depth’ usually remains unarticulated in the background to our lives together, it is always from within such a complexly intertwined space - in ‘answer’ to the ‘calls’ it exerts upon us - that we responsively perform our actions. The unique nature of such spaces can, thus, only be studied *from within* the practices in which they are created. Thus to investigate their nature, their structure, the calls they can exert on us, what is possible for us within them and what is not, we need some utterly new methods of investigation, quite different from the ‘onlooker’ methods inherited from the natural sciences. Instead of dealing with regularities and repetitions, as in modernist inquiries, we must deal with quite specific “once-occurrent events of Being” (Bakhtin, 1993), occurring in the quite distinct and specific realities of understanding emerging between us in the many different relationships in which we become involved. It is toward the nature of these methods, and their comparison with what currently we think it is to be rational, that I would now like to turn.

### **Re-Thinking Learning:** **What the Dialogically-Structured Nature of Our Relations with Our Surroundings Means for Learning**

Central, then, to the re-thinking of learning I wish to pursue in this article, are three major themes, two of which I have already been mentioned above: 1) One is expressed in Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) claim that: “I inevitably grasp my body as a spontaneity which teaches me what I could not know in any other way except through it” (p.93). In other words, the beginning of all our new learning is to be found in our spontaneous bodily responses to events in our surroundings, in what I shall call “living events.” In living events, there is a shift of attention, a shift of bodily energy, the occurrence of a “difference that makes a difference” (Bateson, 1972, p.453). 2) Another theme is that on certain occasions, such living events may be related to each other dialogically, as Bakhtin (1986) puts it – where all such dialogically related events are inevitably creative in some way, related to the circumstances of their occurrence. Indeed, in their intertwining, they give rise to a qualitatively unique kind of unified entity – to the sense of a distinctly structured time-space, with its own kind of multi-dimensional, relational depth, that

one can mentally ‘survey’ – an indivisible whole that is hinted at in none of them separately. This can be likened, as we have seen, to the synthesis over time of the two separate, moment by moment changing, monocular views, into the depth, complexity, unity, and stability of the binocular object. 3) To these two, we must add a third: To say that our bodies are spontaneously responsive to events in our surroundings, is to say, as Garfinkel (1967) puts it, that they are responsive to “seen but unnoticed” events. To act in a more deliberate, self-controlled manner, we must respond to events of our own choosing, that is, to events to which we ourselves direct our attention, to events which, we say, we notice consciously. Conscious noticings are events which we can, not only focus on deliberately, but we can, potentially at least, share our noticing of them with others. They are noticings that others can witness too. Where, to talk of something as being “consciousness” is this way – as something witnessable by others – is to go back, as Toulmin (1982) suggests, to the origins of the word “consciousness,” in con (with)-scientia (knowing), i.e., togetherness-knowing or jointly-knowing, in Roman Law<sup>6</sup>. Taking these three themes together gives us a basis for a radical re-thinking of the nature of learning.

### **Re-thinking learning**

1) Our spontaneous bodily responsiveness in learning: As living beings, we can never cease to be in constant contact with our surroundings. The importance of our living, bodily involvement in, and bodily responsiveness to, real surroundings – surroundings in which we can move about, and to which we can relate ourselves in both a sensory (incoming) and an instrumental (outgoing) fashion in a multiplicity of different ways – cannot be over-emphasized. Indeed, we first react, not as rules demand, but as our circumstances demand.

2) The importance of our responsiveness to the others around us: Closely related to the importance of the situations surrounding us, is our bodily presence to each other. For, by their words and gestures, others can ‘call’ our attention to aspects of our surroundings which are important to them in their practices. So although we first act, not as rules but as our situations demand, the aspects of, or loci, in our situations to which we respond may be selected for us by others.

3) Basic learning occurs spontaneously, without explicit teaching, and is not cognitive (epistemological) in character but bodily (ontological): Initially in our development, we learn to be little Occidentals or Orientals, in England we learn British English while in America American English, we acquire a certain sensibility appropriate to our culture. As Voloshinov

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<sup>6</sup>. “Etymologically, of course, the term “consciousness” is a knowledge word. This is evidenced by the Latin form, -sci-, in the middle of the word. But what are we to make of the prefix con- that precedes it? Look at the usage in Roman Law, and the answer will be easy enough. Two or more agents who act jointly – having formed a common intention, framed a shared plan, and concerted their actions – are as a result conscientes. They act as they do knowing one another’s plans: they are jointly knowing.” (p.64). Toulmin traces how a whole family of words, “whose historic use and sense had to do with the public articulation of shared plans and intentions has been taken over into philosophical theory as providing a name for the most private and unshared aspects of mental life... The term “consciousness” has thus become the name for a flux of sensory inputs that is seemingly neither con-, since each individually supposedly has his or her own, nor sciens, since the sensory flux is thought of as “buzzing and booming” rather than cognitively structured or interpreted ” (p.54).

(1986) puts it: “People do not ‘accept’ their native language – it is in their native language that they first reach awareness” (p.81). Indeed, as I have already begun to argue above, the special phenomena of consciousness and self-directed action (as distinct from mere awareness and spontaneous responsiveness to circumstantial events), is a function of us being able to act in ways related to features in our surroundings witnessable by others. The spontaneous learning (without explicit teaching) taking place in children involved in the everyday, socio-cultural activities of their culture, by those around them offering them opportunities to express certain kinds of responses, has been, for example, studied by Rogoff (1990; Rogoff and Toma, 1997). She describes, for instance, an episode in which a pair of 9 1/2 month twins were eating Cheerios, when their mother first snatched one to eat herself, and then snatched another, put it into one of her baby’s fingers, and postured in a ‘now you feed me’ pose. Both babies laughed hilariously. As Rogoff (1990) comments: “Such passing moments of shared activity, which may or may not have explicit lessons for children, are, I believe, the material for development” (p.17).

4) We learn to act deliberately, to ‘orchestrate’ or ‘regulate’ our higher mental activities, by inserting words of self-instruction and self-direction into our own, otherwise spontaneous or naturally occurring, lower activities: The remarks above suggest that all our new learning grows out of, or is a further articulation within, activities that in some sense we are already doing spontaneously, unthinkingly, or mindlessly. For as he sees it, “...the child about to enter school possesses, in a fairly mature form, the functions he must next learn to subject to conscious control” (Vygotsky, 1986, p.169). Where, by the term “functions” above, he means such psychological functions as perception, attention, memory, thought, language, etc.

But what is involved in subjecting such functions to conscious control, thus to ‘orchestrate’ them in the performance of a higher mental function, is quite complex. We can approach what it might involve by considering the following remark: “What served as a postulate in the old psychology -- the interconnectedness of mental functions,” he says (Vygotsky, 1986), “must become a problem in the new one. The changing interfunctional relations must become a central issue in the study of consciousness. It is this new approach that must be used in tackling the lack of consciousness and deliberate control in school children. The general law of development says that awareness and deliberate control appear only during a very advanced stage in the development of a mental function, after it has been used and practiced unconsciously and spontaneously. In order to subject a function to intellectual and volitional control, we must first possess it:” (p.168). Where, by “changing interfunctional relations,” he means that, instead of allowing the relations between perception, attention, memory, thought, language, etc., to remain under the spontaneous control of circumstances, we can, by taking control of our circumstances, take control of ourselves, by sequencing them into a structure of our own devising. As an example of what he means here, we can take the following situation: “When a human being ties a knot in her handkerchief as a reminder, she is, in essence, [re-]constructing the process of memorizing by forcing an external object to remind her of something; she transforms remembering into an external activity... In the elementary form something is remembered; in the higher form humans remember something. In the first case a temporary link is formed owing to the simultaneous occurrence of two stimuli that affect the organism; in the second case humans personally create a temporary link through the artificial combination of stimuli” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.51, my emphasis). While spontaneous remembering is determined by circumstances, higher forms of remembering come under our own control; we arrange to ‘call



out' a memory from ourselves by the use of an external 'reminder'. This works to reverse the spontaneous interfunctional relations involved: while younger children remember in order to think, older children can think (in terms of external reminders) in order to remember. "Changes in the interfunctional composition of consciousness are the real subject of mental development," says Vygotsky, 1986, p.168).

Thus what we call acting deliberately, thoughtfully, or mindfully, is achieved by us learning from the others around us, how to re-construct our own spontaneous activities and practices, by first inserting into them, 'deconstructive' pauses (we use the words 'Stop!', 'Look!' 'Listen!', etc., on ourselves). We can then go on to introduce into such moments, complexly structured, inner, multi-voiced, instructive dialogues, in which we draw previously unnoticed aspects of our own situation to our own attention. Linguistic signs, first used by others to your activities, can later be used by oneself to guide one's own activities. Vygotsky (1986) comments about the integrating, controlling (of self and others), and specifying function of words, in the child's growth of concepts, along the following lines: "... it is the functional use of the word, or any other sign, as a means of focusing one's attention, selecting distinctive features and analyzing and synthesizing them, that plays a central role on concept formation" (p.106). "Learning to direct one's own mental processes with the aid of words or signs is an integral part of the process of concept formation. The ability to regulate one's actions by using auxiliary means reaches its full development only in adolescence" (p.108). Indeed, as he puts it elsewhere, "the child begins to perceive the world not only through his eyes as through his speech" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.32).

5) Such instructive dialogues must first be carried out by others around us: At first, others expert in a practice we learn, must not only arrange (architect) the situations for our learning, but in their responsive presence to us, use their words to draw our attention at just the appropriate moment in our joint activities, to crucial relations between ourselves and the others and othernesses around us. Further, in being surrounded by a number of such voices, each drawing our attention to yet further aspects of our circumstances from their own points of view, they can give us access to a 'deep' and undivided sense of their nature, a rich and complex multi-dimensional sense of many inter-related aspects. Just as we can appreciate the landscape around us as being to do with people, animals, plants, water, rocks, with roads, buildings, land use, towns, cities, villages, homes, with near and far, north and south, east and west, with many kinds of weather, and so on and so on, to an inexhaustible extent, so we can come to appreciate the rich 'landscape' offered us in much more specific spheres of practice: whether it is music, painting, engineering, mathematics, medicine, or whatever. As Vygotsky (1978) comments: "Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (p.88). Rogoff (1990), in particular, has pursued this approach in her book Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in a Social Context. As she sees it, development is a matter of "... transitions of a qualitative (as well as quantitative) nature that allow a person to manage more effectively the problems of everyday life, relying on resources and constraints offered by companions and cultural practices to define and solve problems. Child development involves appropriation of the intellectual tools and skills of the surrounding cultural community" (p.11).

6) Self-controlled, deliberate action depends on self-conscious noticing of crucial features in one's surroundings, which involves noticing that can be witnessed by others: To act in a more deliberate, self-controlled manner, we must respond to events of our own choosing, that is, to events to which we ourselves direct our attention while ignoring others, to events which, we say, we consciously notice. But conscious noticings are not only events we can focus on deliberately, but their noticing is something we can, potentially at least, share with others. They are possible, witnessable noticings. Thus, a conscious noticing by one of us is such of kind that (i) we could first pause, i.e., inhibit our own impulsive tendencies to spontaneously respond immediately... (ii) we would then turn to 'look over' or 'survey' our current circumstances, while adopting a number of different stances toward them... and then (iii) go on to react to a previously unnoticed possibility. Thus, a conscious noticing provides a moment in our practices when we could change them in ways more appropriate to our circumstances. It could also provide a moment in which our practices could be refined and elaborated in ways which others in our linguistic community could share in too. For, such a noticing is a noticing which we could all do, and then act upon, in the same way, and as Vygotsky noted above, it is the ability to direct one's attention and to regulate one's actions by the use of words or other auxiliary means, that allows us to be self-determining beings. Voloshinov (1986) puts it thus:

“What sort of reality pertains to the subjective psyche? The reality of the inner psyche is the same reality as that of the sign [it has its existence only in the actual or possible relations between people]. Outside the material of signs there is no psyche; there are physiological processes, processes in the nervous system, but no subjective psyche as a special existential quality fundamentally distinct from both the physiological processes occurring within the organism and the reality encompassing the organism from outside, to which the psyche reacts and which one way or another it reflects [and refracts]. By its very existential nature, the subjective psyche is to be localized somewhere between the organism and the outside world, on the borderline separating these two spheres of reality... Psychic experience is the semiotic expression of the contact between the organism and the outside environment. That is why the inner psyche is not analyzable as a thing but can only be understood and interpreted as a sign... Not only can experience be outwardly expressed through the agency of the sign... but also, aside from this outward expression (for others), experience exists even for the person undergoing it only in the material of signs. Outside that material there is no experience as such. In this sense any experience is expressible, i.e., is potential experience... Thus there is no leap involved between inner experience and its expression, no crossing over from one qualitative realm of reality to another” (pp.26-28, my additions).

7) A true sense of reality: Coming to embody an inner, shifting, orchestrated, dialogically-structured way of sustaining a contact with one's surroundings, gives us a basic sense of what counts for us as 'reality' in our dealings with our surroundings. But we realize that not everything which counts for as 'real' individually, counts for every one else in our community. Nonetheless, there is a common “sense,” a shared set of inarticulate feelings, a witnessable consciousness, against the background of which, we can judge any explicit (often

theoretical) statements as to whether they adequately characterize a state of affairs in our surroundings or not.

8) External activities between people become internalized within them: What first occurs out in the world between students and their teachers, later becomes internalized, not so much geographically as ethically, i.e., rather than responsibility for it being shared between learners and teachers, the activity becomes something for which learners can become wholly responsible. Vygotsky (1978) puts it thus: “An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Every function appears in the child’s cultural development twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All higher functions originate as actual relations between people” (p.57). But this does not mean that once we are an adult, all our thinking must go on ‘inside our heads’. Even for us, it may still occur in the dialogically-structured interactions occurring between our words as we write them on the paper (or word processor screen) and our further responses to them.

“I really think with my pen, because my head often knows nothing about what my hand is writing” (Wittgenstein, 1980, p.17).

9) An unending openness to novelty: In being always responsive to new calls coming to one from one’s surroundings, if we can progressively develop our surroundings to ‘call out’ from us more and more complexly orchestrated activities, there should be no end to our learning. Indeed, as Vygotsky (1978) remarks: “We have found that sign operations appear as a result of a complex and prolonged process subject to all the basic laws of psychological evolution. This means that sign-using activity in children is neither simply invented nor passed down by adults: rather it arises from something that is originally not a sign operation and becomes one only after a series of qualitative transformations. Each of these transformations provides the conditions for the next stage and it itself conditioned by the preceding one; thus, transformations are linked like stages of a single process, and are historical in nature” (see Shotter, 1999).

10) Striking or arresting or passing moments, and poetic methods: What matters in new learning is not repetitions and regularities. What matters is the occurrence of new distinctions, of new relations and connections, or of differences that make a difference. Hence, the crucial role played by living examples (not by statements of rules or propositions) that ‘speak for’ a practice. They do so by working poetically; that is, by bringing together two or more situations – see the discussions of relations between the binocular and the dialogical above – not usually juxtaposed. In so doing, they make a difference that makes a difference, a difference that matters. In calling out from us a new response that we have not previously expressed, they provide us with the beginnings for a new way of thinking.

“The origin and the primitive form of the language game is a reaction; only from this can more complicated forms develop. Language - I want to say - is a refinement, ‘in the beginning was the deed’ (Goethe)” (Wittgenstein, 1980, p.31). “The primitive reaction may have been a glance or a gesture, but it may also have been a word” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p.218). “But what is the word

‘primitive’ meant to say here?” he asks, “Presumably that this sort of behavior is pre-linguistic: that a language-game is based on it, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thought” (Wittgenstein, 1981, no.541).

11) Vagueness and ambiguity: The use of gaps, of shifting, oscillating, and unsystematic forms of expression (rather than systematic forms) is important in giving listeners and readers an opportunity to gain knowledge which is, so to speak, is accessible to them; it is continuous with their own being and not alien to them; it is meaningful to them in their lives, rather than having a meaning imposed on it in a one-way fashion by authoritative (Humpty-Dumpty like) others. The two-way nature of dialogically-structured exchanges allows people to make what they learn their own. Bakhtin (1981) puts the issue this way: As he sees it there are two kinds of discourse, “authoritative” and “internally persuasive discourse.” The meanings of terms in authoritative discourse are, in being unresponsive to modification by coming into contact with other voices, fixed. “The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority fused into it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is prior discourse...” (p.342). By comparison: “Internally persuasive discourse...is, as it is affirmed through assimilation, tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own word’. In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition... it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses...The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean” (pp.345-346). Thus strangely, the very idea of a need for clarity, for disciplinary terms to be learned to have a single, unambiguous meaning or definition, makes mindful learning impossible – if by mindful learning we mean learning that we can apply flexibly to new circumstances as they arise.

12) Play and playfulness: As Rogoff and Toma (1997) discuss two quite different ways in which cultures involve their children in what they call “shared thinking.” They compare what they call a “transmit-and-test” (TT) format used extensively here in the West with the “building-ideas-in-a-shared-endeavor” (SE) format used in the Guatemalan Mayan, middle-class Turkish, and Indian tribal farming communities they studied. While the TT format gave rise to learning in lessons as such, children in engaged in SE learning did so “through engagement and eavesdropping on ongoing language use” (p.475). Indeed, the SE group learned by playful participation in group activities involving “multi-party engagements,” i.e., not just expert teachers, but many, informally, from different positions in the life of the community. Although this kind of playful involvement “is not the predominant feature of childhood,” Vygotsky (1978) argues, “it is a leading feature... [For] in fundamental, everyday situations a child’s behavior is the opposite of his behavior in play. In play, action is subordinated to meaning, but in real life, of course, action dominates meaning” (p.101). In other words, play provides a special realm within real life in which one’s spontaneous, impulsive reactions are suspended. The child sitting astride a stick, for instance, responds to it as if it were a horse, moving as an imaginary ‘horse’ requires.

Thus it is in this sense that play becomes a “leading” feature in the child’s psychological development. It provides the child with a “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978), a dialogically-structured space, within which both new motivations and new stances toward reality can be created. The critical point is that in play, “what passes unnoticed by the child in real life [e.g., the possibility of responding to a stick as one responds to a horse] becomes a rule of behavior in play” (Vygotsky, p.95). Indeed, what is of especial importance here – in relation to our interest in children becoming able to bring their behavior under their own self-control – is their spontaneous separation in play of meaning from what is seen, the separation of the field of meaning from the visual field. As Vygotsky (1978) points out, children of two years old, “when asked to repeat ‘Tanya is standing up’ when Tanya is sitting in front of her, will change it to ‘Tanya is sitting down’” (p.97).

Thus in play, “... before a child has acquired grammatical and written language, he knows how to do things, but does not know that he knows. [But] he does not master these activities voluntarily. In play a child spontaneously makes use of his ability to separate meaning from an object without knowing he is doing it, just as he does when speaking in prose but talks without paying attention to the words” (p.99). Paradoxically, a child does things in play that she would not do otherwise. In play, not only does a the child operate “with an alienated meaning in a real situation... [But she also] does what she most feels like doing because play is connected with pleasure – and at the same time she learns to follow the line of greatest resistance by subordinating herself to rules and thereby renouncing what she wants, since subjection to rules and renunciation of impulsive action constitute the path to maximum pleasure in play” (p.99).

## **Conclusions: Mutually Enabling Communities of Learners**

We are now in a position to draw some conclusions to do with the creation of resourceful or enabling communities of learners. I will first state them in general and abstract terms, and then in terms of a project (in which I am involved - see Shotter and Gustavsen, 1999) which I think already embodies many of the features important in creating such communities.

Taken together, what all these comments on the re-thinking learning amount to, is the need to shift our current focus in the West, on learning as a result of explicit teaching, on it as a matter of the one-way transmission of information by an expert, toward learning another kind of learning altogether. For, there is another, much more basic and important kind of learning that occurs without teachers, spontaneously within our everyday engaged involvements in activities shared with the others around us. In current Western, Cartesian influenced notions of knowledge and learning, what is learned is such that when a problem arises, the tendency is for the knowledgeable person to turn away from the situation in which it occurs, and to take thought (experts should have discussions in seminar or conference rooms). While in the approach being advocated here, the tendency is for knowledgeable people, first to take pause, to then look over the situation before them ‘through’ a number of alternative forms of talk, thus to select and to inter-relate features in it in ways quite different from those spontaneously selected and related. It is the quite different way of paying to attention to ongoing events in one’s surroundings that is crucial in distinguishing the different consequences of the kind of learning involved. Wittgenstein’s (1953) remark – that we can come to a recognition of the workings of our

language as a whole, “not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known” (no.109) – can be generalized. New learning is achieved when abilities that are exercised spontaneously, as something that children already know how to do without knowing that they know, are first ‘called out’ from one by the words of others, which later one can ‘call out’ from oneself by one’s own words. In such circumstances as these, learning occurs as just one moment in an otherwise continuous, multi-party involvement, in which a shared field of creativity emerges in which all alike are collaboratively engaged. Indeed, we can imagine a whole inter-related sequence of different kinds of moments spontaneously occurring within the doing of a shared practice – some being prototypically to do with providing a commentary on it, others with critiquing it, some with rendering it more shareable, while others are to do with teaching or researching into it. In such a process as this, we continually draw on resources already available to us in our existing forms of life together; we draw on them by inserting into our already existing practices, a dialogical practice, i.e., moments when we pause in the otherwise mindless following of established routines, and through the use of words, turn our attention to previously unnoticed features in our surroundings. As a result, we are better able to find our ‘way about’ inside our own practices of social construction, and less likely to ‘mislead’ or to confuse ourselves. Where all this depends on us working from the new beginnings we can find in our body’s spontaneous responsiveness to events from within our already existing practices.

I would now like to turn to the Swedish “Learning Regions” project. No teachers are involved in the project. Instead, its goal “has been to initiate and provide the basis for co-operation between enterprises in regions, local public bodies, organizations and other interest groups. By co-operating over the different sectors of society, the resources available for the development of competence and enterprises can be better used and achieve greater results, thereby providing the preconditions for an increase in employment and sustainable development in the regions” (Arbetslivsinstitutet, Solna, pamphlet). In other words, all involved are learning resources for each other, and overall, the region constitutes, in Bruner’s (1996) terms, a mutual community of learners, with all involved jointly in the process of educating one another.

Central to the project are a number of regional universities and regional Industrial Development Centers (IUCs). In 1997, the law governing higher education and research in Sweden added “a third task” to be done by these regional universities and IUCs: “they were now no longer expected just to educate and to do research but also to relate to and collaborate with their local environment... [T]his third task implies a new form of knowledge, viz., knowledge generated in interactive cooperation with practitioners” (Brulin, 1998, p.113), i.e., in dialogues.

As we shall see, in the collaborative dialogues between academic researchers and practitioners (a term I shall use for all the stakeholders in a region: business people, members of state institutions, other enterprises or regional members, etc.), a dialogically-structured space, or shared field of creativity, emerges. In their responsive conversations together - whether it is between a single researcher and a practitioner or regional stakeholder, or between regional members who don’t usual meet with each other, or when the whole group involved in a “dialogue conference” comes together - participants shift between moments in which details of their practical lives are articulated, moments of reflection and instruction, and what might be called ‘research’ moments, with each moment informing and specifying the other. As the details of the different moments are spelt out, their reciprocal relevance, the non-separable aspects of

their nature, becomes apparent: the doing, the commentary, the sharing, the elaborating, the critiquing, the teaching, the researching, the relating of each other's activities to all the other crafts and practices in the surrounding region, to economics, to the region's administration, and, especially, to everyone's everyday lives, etc., are all intermingled in together. Indeed, in this process, practitioners become co-researchers, and academic researchers become co-practitioners, as each articulates what they have been 'struck by', i.e., what they have noticed, in the unfolding process. As a result, people's practical living activities, teaching, and research are all enfolded with each other, as one in-forms and creates the other in a evolving, generative fashion<sup>7</sup>. As previously mentioned, people draw out responses from each other that they lack the resources to draw out from themselves. A central feature of the learning regions project – along with the formation of regional development coalitions and a network of Industrial Development Centers (IUCs) – is the conduct from time to time of Dialogue Conferences. The point of such conferences is to afford effective communication between those stakeholders in a region who do not usually come into face-to-face, living contact with each other – with all the advantages discussed above of such contacts. The basic rules, or better, “orientational directives,” regulating the conduct of the conferences are below.

#### Basic rules or “orientational directives” for “Dialogue Conferences:

- Work experience is the point of departure for participation (concrete examples are important - in particular, “moving” events that one has been “struck by”).
- All concerned with the issues under discussion should have the possibility of participating.
- Dialogue is based on a principle of give and take, or two-way discourse, not one-way communication (participants must be responsive to each other).
- Participants are under an obligation to help other participants be active in the dialogue.
- All participants have the same “rank” in the dialogue arenas
- Some of the concrete experiences possessed by participants on entering the dialogue must be seen as relevant.
- It must be possible for all participants to gain an understanding of the topics under discussion (time must be spent in achieving this).
- An argument can be rejected only after exploration of its details (and not, for instance, on the grounds that it emanates from a source with limited legitimacy).
- All arguments that are to enter the dialogue must be expressed by the actors present.
- All participants are obliged to accept that other participants may have arguments better than their own.
- Among the issues that can be made subject to discussion are also the ordinary work roles of the participants - no-one is exempt from such a discussion (something unique can be seen from every position in a relational-landscape).

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<sup>7</sup> See Shotter and Katz, 1996, and Katz and Shotter, 1996, where all this is spelt out in much more detail in relation to a medical mentorship program.

The dialogue should be able to integrate a growing number of differences (indeed, it is precisely from their integration into a living whole that a sense of the region's relational landscape emerges).

The dialogue should continuously generate decisions that provide platforms for joint action.

The form of the dialogue conference is an application of the principles of a democratic dialogue.

The first directive in the list above is crucial. It means that everything discussed in the Dialogue Conference has the character of a living example. Further, in being to do with a person's work experience, others find little difficulty in orienting and responding to it. When participants are focusing on events occurring in the discourse (rather than on "hidden realities" that the discourse is supposed to be about), new issues (possibilities) emerge in terms of how such events are responded to and understood by new others.

In people's living relations to one another, it is not their general, theoretical understandings that matter, but their relational-responsive understandings of the unique details of their region, a matter of their practical rather than their reflective consciousnesses. And, as each detail is spontaneously enunciated in a dialogue conference in a responsive, living relation to a just previously enunciated detail, participants are able to sense the link of each to the other, and to link them all into a dynamic, living, scenic-sense of the region as a whole. This practical understanding of their region, from within their involvement in it, is of a kind quite different to that usually articulated in academic analyses. Such analyses are usually of a retrospective, objective, and disinterested kind, while the accounts offered in a Dialogue Conference are of a prospective, relational, interested kind; they focus on quite particular, relational possibilities for the actual future development of a region. Furthermore, the possibilities focused on are of a kind that the participants in the region themselves understand; they are an aspect of their own practical consciousness; they know how "to relate" to them. Thus it is in their power to articulate them further, both linguistically and materially.

While academics might feel that discussion of region's future should be about a regional action plan, and that everything that does not pertain items and priorities within the plan is a waste of time and effort, Dialogue Conferences make it clear that many other kinds of events are of great importance too. Such events as people simply "getting to know each other," "making relationships," "swapping stories about life events," "finding one's way about inside the region," "finding coalition partners," and so on – which might seem mere social niceties to be indulged in only for leisure purposes – are important details in organizing the regional actors into an enabling community. All these 'trivialities' come to acquire a major significance, for it is these myriad trivialities which are fashioned -- in dialogically-structured processes in the Conference – into a meaningful whole, into a shared sense of "our region."

As all this may sound to many as if those of us engaged in this project have abandoned the grand aims of science far too easily, we would like to offer these final comments: As the kind of research I have been discussing here is only a partner in the development processes of region (not the director of it), this kind of research has to relate to the same dynamic scenic-sense of the region that is shared by all the other participants involved. As a consequence, we have not



sought, nor do we think that the possibility exists, to reduce all the discourses involved to one single kind of ideal type discourse. Indeed, if the dialogues in question are to remain “democratic dialogues,” this must not and cannot be our aim. For the essence of a democratic dialogue is, we believe, that it is only structured as such by all those within it bringing to bear *from within its conduct* what “orientational directives” *they*, at any one moment feel are appropriate to its democratic conduct. In other words, rather than being based on externally imposed, prior, abstract “organizing principles,” formulated by supposed experts on the basis of their reasoning or experience, we believe that regional participants must also develop a set of “orientational directives” appropriate to their own historical, geographic, economic, social, and political conditions. As just one of the voices in such dialogues, the directives we have offered here are not offered as finally definitive of what a ‘proper’ democratic dialogue is - we, like many others in a region, can only make offers which, in relation to a region’s needs can be taken by others in the region as a possible “resource.”

Thus, we cannot take our main task to be that of creating an abstract, representational understanding of the “hidden meanings” that participants themselves are unaware of, as if they are located “deeply beyond the surface” of their lives. Nor can we take our ultimate aim to be that of providing *them* with *our* “organizing principles.” We feel that we must stick with what we can hear and see and place *from within* the kinds of involvements that we can have as a interested partners in a region’s development. And offer what help we can - as academics and intellectuals with some practice in linguistic and conceptual issues - in creating sensible patterns among the events we can hear and see and place, with as little use of intervening principles as possible. Where, all the time we are, in our dealings with each other, being sensitive to the new beginnings offered us by our bodies in their responses to the events occurring in our surroundings. This is what we feel is involved in helping to construct living enabling communities of mutual learners. To emphasize this, I will end with a remark of Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) to this effect: “My body is not only an object amongst all other objects,... but an object which is sensitive to all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds, vibrates to all colors, and provides words with their primordial significance through the way in which it receives them.... We are not, then reducing the significance of the word, or even of the percept, to a collection of ‘bodily sensations’ but we are saying that the body, in so far as it has ‘behavior patterns’, is that strange object which uses its own parts as a general system of symbols for the world, and through which we can consequently ‘be at home in’ that world, ‘understand’ it and find significance in it” (pp.236-237).

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