

Chapter 6.5

Using the Interpersonal Action–Learning Cycle to Invite Thinking, Attentive, Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

This chapter shows how the interpersonal action-learning cycle (IALC) can be used to invite thinking, attentive comprehension from learners in conversation. It explains what the IALC is, where it comes from, how it works, and why. In particular, it offers a logical demonstration that all interpersonal learning takes place within the IALC, and that all competition for dominance lies outside it—suggesting conscious use of the IALC as a desirable practice. The chapter goes on to explore linguistic factors that routinely disrupt use of the IALC, and that can hide its very existence. Strategies for restoring and stabilizing it are offered. Routine use of the IALC can have profound implications for teaching and instruction, collaborative learning, assessment, course evaluation, and professional development. These are explored.

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INTRODUCTION: YOUR OWN THOUGHTS

This chapter starts with a form of advance-organizer (Ausubel, 1968). You are invited to think about instructional design, by considering how you would answer six questions. If you think that you are in the business of meeting learners' needs, you might find these questions startling—they invite you to focus on a need of your own:

1. What do you most notice about how learners respond to you?
2. What do you imagine are the reasons?
3. How do you feel about that?
4. What is it that you need, that this feeling suggests?
5. What are you doing as a teacher to meet this need?
6. What responses from learners would help you most in doing so?

Although I cannot hear your thoughts, I imagine that as a teacher you would like to help people learn—so that in answer to Question 6, I imagine that the responses you would find most helpful from learners might be summarized as:

- Their attentiveness toward you
- Their accurate comprehension of what you regard as important, and possibly
- Their own relevant creative thinking

If so, then this chapter is addressed to you. It describes the three learning behaviors above, and presents an argument that just three conversational actions are needed in order to invite them. These three actions form the interpersonal action-learning cycle (IALC).

The following sections describe:

- Where the IALC comes from and how it works
- What routinely disrupts it
- How in practice it can be sustained

BACKGROUND: WHERE THE IALC COMES FROM AND HOW IT WORKS

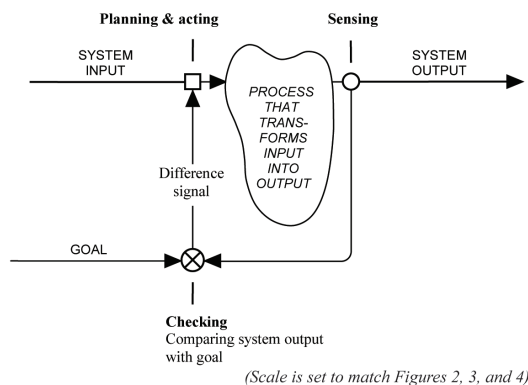
The interpersonal action-learning cycle (IALC) results when the generic action-learning cycle is applied to interpersonal communication.

The Generic Action-Learning Cycle

Figure 1 shows the generic control model. Around it are arrayed the actions, ‘sensing / checking / planning & acting,’ which take place respectively at the sensor, comparator, and effector. They take place whenever a goal-oriented process is in play, and they make up the generic action-learning cycle.

The process itself, denoted by the blob in the centre of the diagram, is a transformational process of some kind—it transforms an input into an output.

Figure 1. The generic action-learning cycle: Sensing / checking / planning & acting



As time progresses, the output is sensed and then is checked against the goal. The difference between the two is used to plan the action that will be taken, in order to modify the input so that the output will more closely approach the goal. Once the action is taken, the output is sensed again to see how well the action worked—and so on around the cycle. Each time around, both the environment and the actor’s capabilities are being learned about.

The Subjective Action-Learning Cycle

Figure 2 shows how the cycle looks when it is made subjective—that is, when I myself do the sensing / checking / planning & acting. The transformation process becomes my engagement with my environment, and the transformation is from ‘myself before’ each turn around the cycle to ‘myself after.’

A well-known example of this subjective form of the action-learning cycle is Kolb’s cycle of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). (see Box 1)

The Personal Action-Learning Cycle

Figure 3 shows what happens in addition, when I take conscious note of what I am doing. The cycle becomes my personal action-learning cycle:

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