

Psychodrama and taking learning seriously in the work place

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The Moreno Collegium for Human Centred Learning, Research and Development

A paper for workshop participants of the AITD National Conference held in Sydney 22/23 April 2008

This paper

This paper has been prepared in order to complement a workshop session designed to introduce psychodrama as a valuable learning tool for organisations and individuals. This workshop also addresses the very real area of levels of learning and their appropriate/inappropriate application in training and learning arenas.

Applications of imagination, spontaneity and creativity to our lives

Psychodrama? What's that? Well reflect for a moment with me, will you? Do you enjoy watching a sport? Do you have a favourite sport? If you don't please imagine being someone who does. Imagine going to a live game and it is the grand final. It is 3 seconds before the time runs out; the teams are level; silence reigns as we await an umpire's decision about an infringement that will lead to a free kick; the swirls are coming onto the giant video screen; we are all about to see the decision..... Can you feel that sense of expectation and elements of being there? That's psychodrama.

Reflect a bit more with me. You love music and always have, or can imagine being someone who does. You are maybe a bit of a head banger. You have tickets to your favourite group which has finally come to Australia; they are playing a venue where you can get to; they have been playing for some time and you are in the *zone*; you can feel the pulse of the music; you are highly stimulated; they are playing THE SONG; your most favourite song; you look on expectantly your heart and mind ready; awaiting the glorious guitar riff or guttural roar that always comes at the crescendo. Can you sense this creativity in you arising? This is psychodrama.

Imagine you are in a meeting that for all intents and purposes is going nowhere. You know this; you assume everyone else knows this. You sit there and really wish you could do something about it without getting up to any career limiting moves. You know your stuff. You know what you "should" say. But even after knowing this you hold back. Being able to practice this situation without there being any career limiting aspects is psychodrama.

Again: you have just given the organisation notice of a significant enough change that is coming down. You expect trouble and trouble comes. But because you

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expected this trouble you are ready for it. However trouble comes from sources you thought were in support. Trouble comes in ways that you didn't expect. Some staff frame the change as though it were actually designed to make their life hell. You are really surprised. You wish you could have foreseen some of these issues. Being able to actively step into other shoes and actively work with their worldview to make an accurate analysis of their motives and concerns. To try life out before life overtakes you, this is psychodrama.

This question often arises - what is psychodrama?

Well you already know that so much training and self-development is shallow and simplistic: 'Learn this and you will be able to do that'. But human beings don't work this way, because real life is complex and unpredictable. Knowing *what to do* is very different from being *able to do* it. Psychodrama is a profound way to look at life in all its complexity and chaos. And to do this in a teachable, straightforward manner. This way you can face life with confidence and spontaneity.

'Psyche' relates to the spirit or mind, while 'drama' relates to the stories acted out in life every day. By combining mind and action, psychodrama gets to the reality beneath the surface. It teaches you to 'feel colours' or 'see smells', as it were. It may sound a bit 'airy fairy' but it's not. Once you get below the surface you can learn things about yourself and the roles you play that will help you make a real difference to your life and the lives of people around you.

How does psychodrama work in practice?

In a typical session, a small group of enthusiastic people work cooperatively to do their personal or professional psychodramas and are led by an experienced practitioner. The director will invite someone to get up and act out some of their deepest personal or communal concerns, such as being bullied in the workplace, or the plight of the homeless in society. Others in the group will join in, acting the extra roles in the person's drama. The session develops spontaneously as each person in turn takes the lead role in their own drama or support roles in other people's dramas under the careful guidance of the experienced practitioner.

In this open-ended way, people find ideas and solutions they didn't know they had, and which they would never have found using conventional training or self-discovery methods. Instead of passively absorbing 'the answers' (tertiary level learning), they actively find their own answers and help other people find theirs. The whole thing is spontaneous and fluid, not didactic and rigid.

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As a participant in a psychodrama session you can explore the life situations that are of interest and concern to you through this type of dramatic enactment. In the course of the enactment you can express, refine and integrate new ways of being and doing. Psychodrama works for people of all ages and cultures with a wide range of life experiences. It strengthens your sense of self. It also strengthens your relationships with others and your effectiveness in groups.

Why does psychodrama work?

Psychodrama works through actively engaging your's and your client's imagination and spirit. Psychodrama works with those deep and important pictures of life, those moments of life where you need a return visit. Psychodrama has us looking at life, engaging with life, taking life apart and gently and with great care putting it back together again. Contrary to the rhyme, Humpty Dumpty can be put back together and put back together any way that works for you, painted, ennobled, enabled, wiser or friendlier or even scrambled if you prefer.

Psychodrama is a technology for creativity. It pumps life into tired old bones enabling them to dance and sing with the power of life. Psychodrama sets up an authentic and sustainable life. It does this by tapping into each person's natural spontaneity that lies at the core of their being. That spontaneity allows people to do remarkable things, truly remarkable things.

Psychodrama is taught experientially. Practitioners and practitioner training are accredited through the Australian and New Zealand Psychodrama Association Inc (ANZPA). The training is highly interactive, involving you with working with yourself, your life, the life of others and the development of the group. This method of teaching provides a form of deep learning that grounds the learning in your identity not just a series of ideas. If you have any queries please contact me at the web site below.

This presented session includes the model of Levels of Learning. A short rendition of this model follows.

For any comments, queries, or for further discussions please call me on 0411 873 851 or contact me via the contact form at our website listed below.

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Levels of Learning

Levels of learning is a working heuristic (rule of thumb) that is easy to use as both a reflective tool and a planning tool. Elizabeth Synnot and I have been working with it in groups and on it from a theoretical perspective for many years. When combined with other sophisticated models of human learning and functioning it is one pointer to the variation of human experience and lends confidence to planning or analysis of learning situations.

Table 1: Levels of Learning from different theoretical perspectives

Levels	Colloquial	Knowles	Friere	Mezirow	Buddhist	Moreno	Clayton
Tertiary	Learning about/jargon	Knowledge	Transfer	Instrumental Domain	Knowing	Knowledge Centre	Head
Secondary	Learning how, know-how	Abilities	Transact	Communicative Domain	Doing	Action Centre	
Primary	Identity as	Attitudes	Transform	Perspective transformation	Being	Learning Centre	Heart, self

Each column should be read from top to bottom. Each column is a theoretical worldview on its own. The presentation of each of these models in this one is a fit not made in heaven but works more or less well. The fact is that there are very few models of learning available that have anything like a concept of *depth* in learning. Peter Howie is currently working to develop a conceptual model of deep learning by doing a philosophical analysis of Mezirow's model of Transformational Learning with Bigg's model of a deep learning process.

The levels work this way – primary level is deep or core learning, secondary is less deep and less core and tertiary has the least depth. Tertiary effects us the least, secondary learning effects us much more and primary learning is life changing. Learning would be the outcome of one such effect.

This makes more sense when going down each column. The following is an explication of each column.

Colloquial – how it is referred to in everyday life

At the **tertiary level** we recognise this type of learning as learning about something, getting to know the words, the jargon and the ideas associated with some area of interest. When joining a new professional group we recognise the first step of simply getting in tune with the local jargon. In a new job or getting

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with a new change there are usually a wide variety of new ideas, structures and frames of reference. These need to be remembered and used for staff to not feel left out or to avoid retribution by supervisors. Consequently they are used superficially, often in the expectation that they will change anyway.

At the **secondary level** we recognise this level of learning as learning how to do something, having the know-how to act and act appropriately. In a work environment this often takes months and really only happens when a person engages directly with their work. Whatever else a person has learned about their work at the tertiary level they will have a different experience when they come to enact and live that work role.

At the **primary level** it is having the identity that goes with the actions and ideas. So a person can know something but not know how to act (tertiary level learning). A person can know how to act but not understand when, why or under what conditions (secondary level learning). If a person has the identity then even without all the knowledge or experience they can act appropriately. With the identity they can utilize their experience, their knowledge in a congruent fashion. It is this identity that professional groups seek for their members to gain. A trainee accountant is a long way from an accountant. A newly minted IT professional is a long way from an IT professional. A person in a new position is a long way from the identity of a person who has been in it for some time.

Knowles

Malcolm Knowles has been a seminal and influential researcher and adult educator. He tried to get adult educators to treat adults as different from children in how they learned. He had some success but if you look at the type of training programs around you will notice a lot of similarity with remembering your times tables. You may have your own experience of some adult educational settings that still treat you like you are a child. Knowles' model actually had different levels at different times - 5 one time and then 7 at another – as he developed his ideas. He continually worked at it. He talked about knowledge (the **tertiary level**), abilities (the **secondary level**) and attitudes (the **primary level**).

Friere

Paulo Friere influenced generations of adult educators. He wanted adult educators to consider whether they were working for the best interests of their students. If teachers were only teaching their students enough to continue in servitude or serfdom then he challenged them to think further. So Friere considered teaching as an ongoing developmental experiment. He noted that

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teaching was often made up of transfer methods. That is methods that transferred ideas, knowledge or concepts from “jug to mug”, as though adults and children can open their heads and have knowledge poured in. This idea is still prevalent with a recent University advertisement in Australia having a student put a CD-Rom into a slot that came out of her head. I call this **tertiary level** learning.

At the **secondary level** of learning students interact in a transactional manner. This is usually accomplished through teaching that emphasises students working together on a common project. For instance setting up a school farm, a school radio station, setting up businesses where the transactional nature of the work leads to learning at many levels. Doing projects can fall into this kind of area. At work this is often achieved through delegating to a person or group a project or special piece of work that is designed to stretch them. A core staff development idea is to have staff take on challenging work at the edge of their competence. This is **secondary level** learning.

At the **primary level** Friere wanted teachers to have students consider why they were learning what they were learning. He wanted students/adults to get to know the underlying economic and social values that stopped them considering a more abundant life. Remember that he was preaching in South America where much of the population was enthralled to wealthy land owners and emasculating cultural norms. He was concerned that teachers were in effect serving the wealthy land owners rather than the people working on the land. This area is a tricky one in the work place because many organisations have a range of conflicting organisational values operating which actually require that the underlying values are not considered and looked at with much scrutiny. If Friere were teaching to adults in organisations he might well be more interested in whether their organisations were serving the staff and the communities greater good. This is in distinction to serving the interest of the organisation – to survive, make money, be productive, and defeat the opposition. When organisations promulgate the idea that they have certain values and want their staff to follow them as well, most of us know it is a bit like wishing for world peace. Or at the depth of that comedy movie where all the beauty queens talk about what they want and then add “And world peace.”

Mezirow and Transformational Learning

Jack Mezirow coined the term *transformational learning* to describe changes he researched in woman taking up studies and other educational opportunities in their middle lives in the USA in 1978. It has a striking similarity the movie “Educating Rita” made in the late 80’s. His model has continued to develop and

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I'm not sure he would like to have it presented in this way. It is a bit of a retro-fit. The *instrumental learning domain* of his model involves the understanding of "how things work" and how to manipulate the environment, including people, such as the arena of engineering, adult learning, trades, management, skills and other technical arenas – **tertiary level** learning. The *instrumental learning domain* relates to learning about cause-effect relationships, problem solving and meaning is created deductively through experimenting with the environment to become more effective in controlling it in a given problem arena.

The *communicative domain* involves the relationships between people, how we communicate together, and present ourselves and generally how beliefs and practices of human communication occur. The *communicative domain* includes "understanding, describing and explaining intentions; values; ideals; moral issues; political, philosophical, psychological, or educational concepts; feelings and reasoning." (Mezirow 1991 p75). The communicative domain is where we learn about cultural and social group norms of behaviour and thought. It is where meaning is created through abductive reasoning, which is the process of using our own experience to understand another's. Is this **secondary level** learning? Well all abilities or know-how require that we can act in a contextual manner and that falls squarely into this domain. Really, some of this domain is tertiary as well – rote learning about how people operate is **tertiary level learning** and it is **secondary level** learning when it involves action and doing in the moment.

Perspective transformation is central to transformative learning. Perspective transformation is the element of transformative learning that occurs when a person shifts in one or more of their basic beliefs. Mezirow refers to basic beliefs as meaning structures that he calls *meaning perspectives*. A meaning perspective is the 'structure of assumptions within which one's past experience assimilates and transforms new experience' (Mezirow 1991, p42). Hence, perspective transformation is an abbreviation for meaning perspective transformation. Meaning perspectives in Transformation Theory are synonymous with 'personal constructs', 'perceptual filters', 'conceptual maps', 'metaphors', 'personal ideologies', and 'habits of expectation' or 'ideas about how the world works' or 'how the world works best' (Mezirow 1991). More recently Mezirow has been using other synonymous terms more recognisable to lay people such as a 'habit of mind', a 'perspective', a 'concept', an 'attitude', an 'outlook', a 'position', a 'way of thinking', a 'strongly held group of opinions or beliefs', a 'deeply held value', an 'identity', a 'worldview' or a 'point of view' (Mezirow 2000). This is **primary level** learning. As I mentioned earlier, Jack Mezirow would not present his model in this way. He would include perspective transformation in each of the two domains – in this model of Levels of Learning it nevertheless fits when

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considered as learning related to depth. In fact it could be seen as an adjunct or extension of his model.

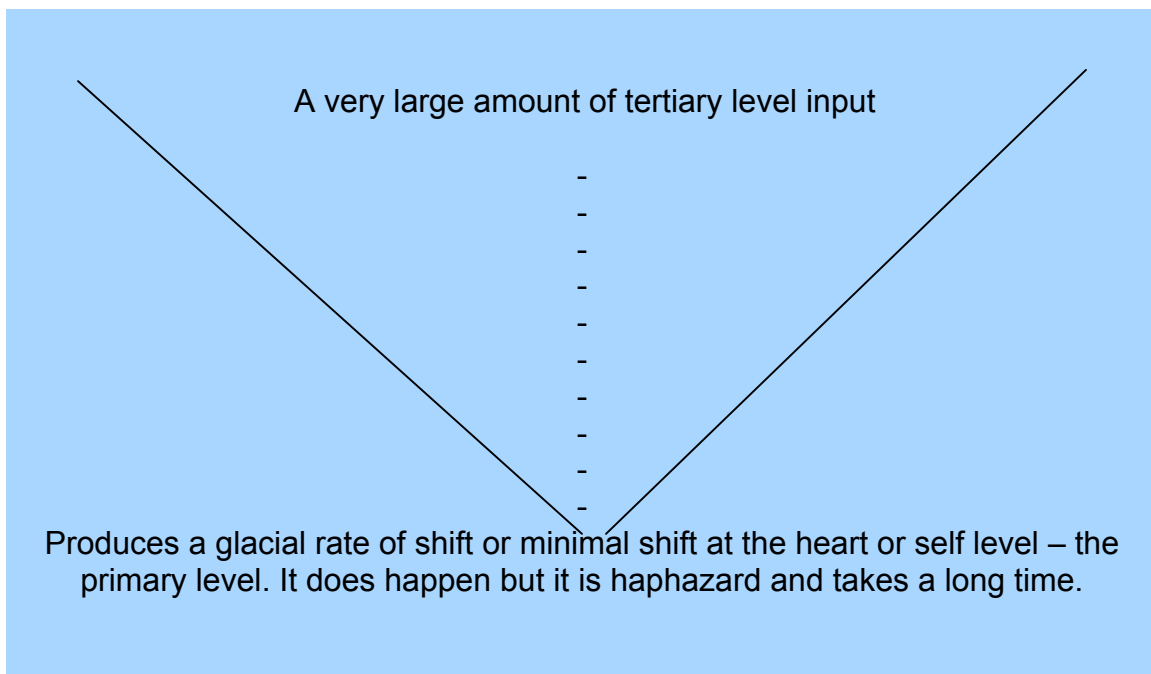
Buddhist

This is self explanatory. 'Knowing' is **tertiary** and is related to knowing about things, the world, life, ideas, and dogma. 'Doing' is **secondary** about being able to act and to do things. 'Being' is the **primary** level and is related to who you are and what you are. Apologies to any Buddhists who are offended by this simplicity.

Clayton

Dr G Max Clayton developed a model called the Cog Theory of Learning and presented it at a workshop I was attending some years ago.

A very large change at the 'head level', that is, immense amounts of reading, listening, cogitating, considering, discussing may lead to a very small, insignificant or no change at the heart or self level



The process of effecting deep levels by working downwards from the tertiary and secondary levels is slow.

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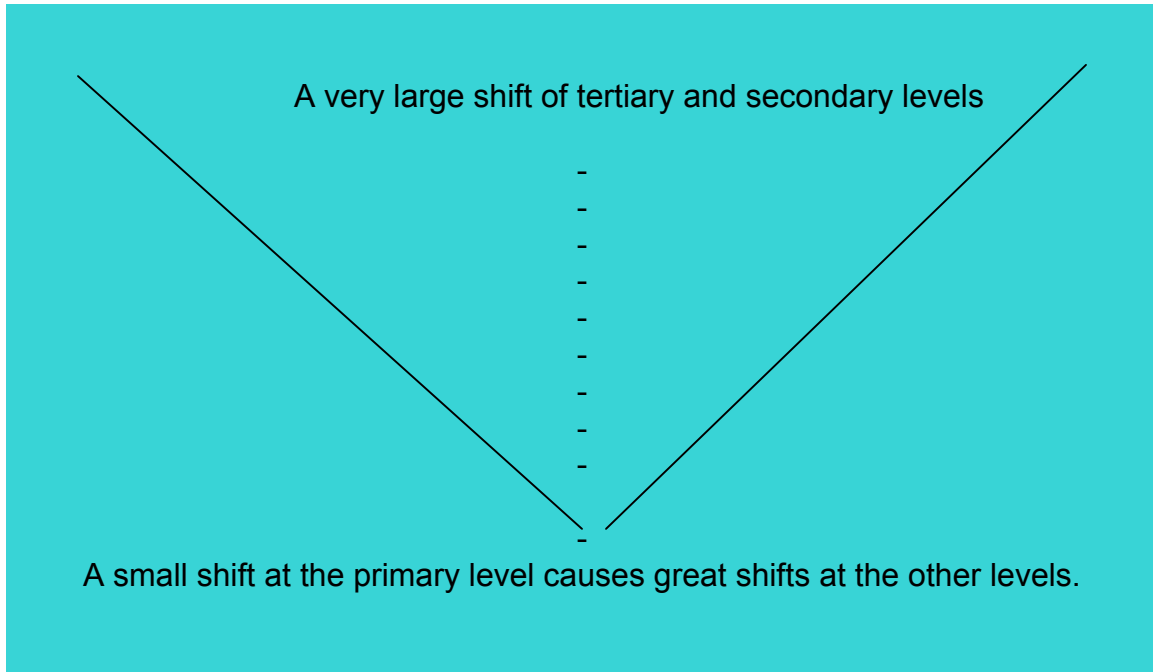
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On the other hand a very small shift at the primary level will cause great shifts at the other levels. This process works from the deeper levels and flows upwards to the secondary and tertiary levels.



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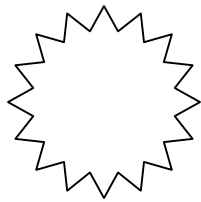
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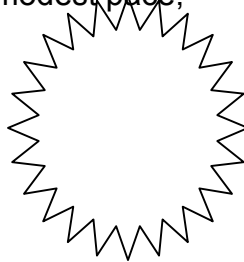
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Max produced this model using and calling it the Cog Model. The cog is used here as a metaphor for the disproportionate way the heart effects the head and not the other way around. He created it in the moment and I remember it better than he does. Imagine a series of cogs or progressively greater or smaller size.

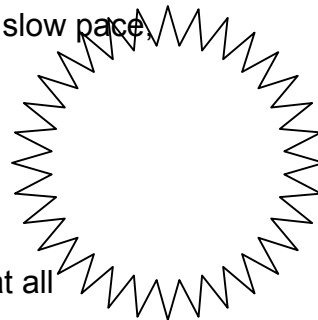
1 cm cog – turning really, really fast,



Turns this 10 cm cog at a modest pace,

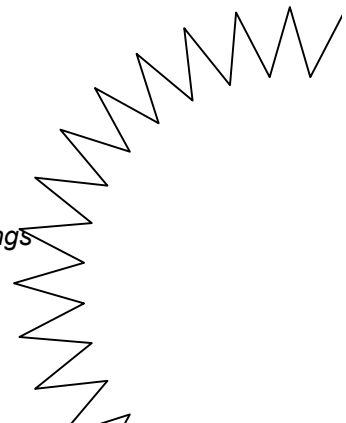


Which in turn rotates this 2 metre cogs at a very slow pace



Which in turn rotates this 250 metre cog barely at all

And this 2 km cog is seen to move once a millennium.



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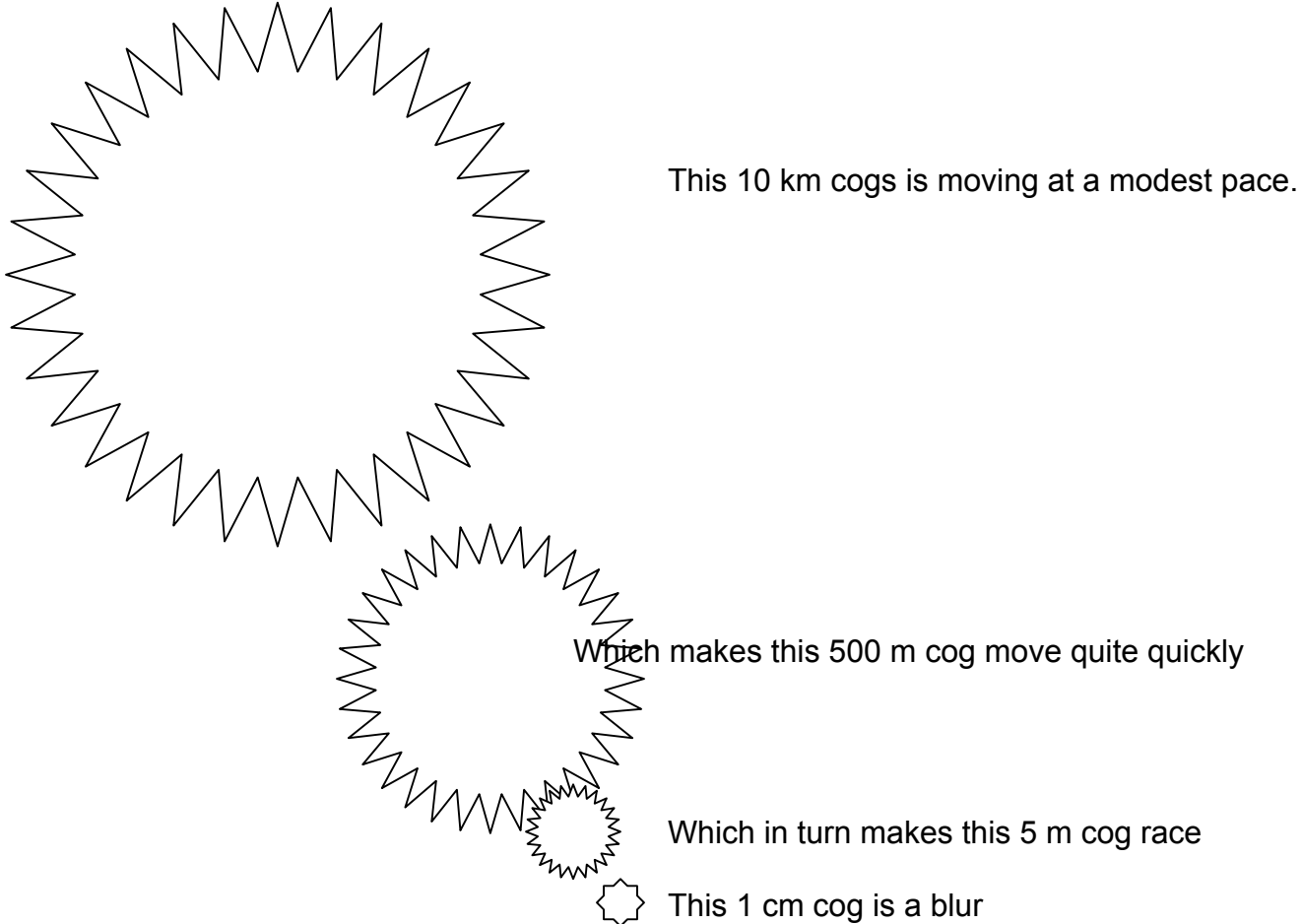
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This is the head influencing the heart so that the heart changes. This is **tertiary level** learning.

Primary level learning looks more like this.



When the heart is shifting, as it often does when profound and deep learning occurs, the head can be profoundly effected.

Some general notes on this kind of model

- In any group there will be participants learning at different levels at the same time. It would be a very rare occurrence where the whole group was learning at the primary level.
- While people may be in a learning group or a learning environment they may not necessarily be learning at all.

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- Generally speaking most people are not reluctant to engage in **tertiary level** learning. In our culture in Australia, tertiary level learning is seen as acceptable. Most of us can do it OK at least for a while. People are more reluctant to undertake **secondary level** learning and different performance anxieties often become animated. Most people are highly reluctant to learn at the **primary level**. This is because most of us are very wary of engaging in activities that might “change” us. At the **primary level** of learning our identity, our self is being effected. The crafting of a warm up process that will encourage or allow us to learn at this level is an art.
- When going from tertiary to secondary to primary level learning affect or feeling is engaged more and more.
- Most of our education systems work at the **tertiary level** with some at the **secondary level** and a small amount at the **primary level**. Thank god for this.
- In our lives we cannot take too much **primary level** learning, as it can be too disturbing.
- Framing an adult educative learning process as being able to change a person’s values, beliefs or worldview is often highly grandiose or as some colleagues have put it ‘grandiarse’.
- If a person or group enters into a process of warming up and developing their spontaneity then **primary level** learning is very possible. Psychodrama and Morenian processes generally work at the primary level but also have significant implications at the other levels. That is: a protagonist, the auxiliaries and the audience members in the group often learn at all levels during the course of a drama and this is often reflected in the debriefing process.

Learning and teaching processes most appropriate to each level

The following table illustrates the rough positions of learning processes as they relate to levels of learning. These boxes should rather be overlapping circles but my graphic capacity is rather limited. For instance discussions can be secondary, as well, depending on your relationships with the person you are discussing an idea with. Perhaps if you run into a latter day Socrates they may indeed effect you at a **primary level**.

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Table 2: Learning technologies appropriate for each level of learning

Tertiary	Lectures	Discussions	Reading	Movies, videos,	General input processes	Single loop reflection
Secondary	Practice, projects, special areas of work	Discussions with examination of values, demonstration and simulations	Trying out and role play	On the job learning and demonstration	Concretisation, dramatic methods, Role Training and Morenian methods	Double loop reflection, critical reflection on learning bias
Primary	Reflection both written and discussions	Dialogue, Intimate relationships where role reversal occurs	You teaching others	Examination of values, worldview, deep simulations	Psychodrama sociodrama, sociometry, role training	Triple loop reflection, critical reflection on assumptions

According to Jack Mezirow the language of metaphor, narrative and story is the only way to access and meaningfully discuss things at the tertiary level.

This is a general model and as I wrote at the beginning of this paper – it is a useful rule of thumb. There are many other factors that allow a person to learn at a deeper level. There can be many times when a person reads a book which I have suggested is generally a **tertiary level** learning process yet they are profoundly affected at a **primary level**. For instance a well placed/timed quote, poem or piece of music can affect a person. Or a biography. As an attempt to make this model more inclusive of these types of moments I suggest that either:

1. Those learning processes that influence learning below their typical level do so by creating a reflective loop of some sort either externally or internally, such as when listening to music. It is the critical reflective work that lead to the learning. Or
2. Timing is all and I recommend you read Berne Neville's book *Educating Psyche*. His model includes the steps of Preparation, Incubation, illumination and Verification model where illumination is a critical time factored learning moment.

The place of insight

Insight is one of those things that is lauded from many areas of learning. This model suggests that insight also has different levels. So **primary level** insight is simply insight about ideas. Such as when an idea makes wonderful sense to you or you are able to manipulate ideas to express a complex idea. If a learning program produces insight at the **tertiary level** this may never translate into action or learning at the **secondary level** let alone the **primary level**. A great number

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of motivational speakers and perhaps this presenter as well is able to produce insights at the tertiary level because educationally we are taught to play pretty easily at this level.

Secondary level insight is where a person understands or has an “ah ha!” moment around their work – they see a new way and do the new way. For instance understanding that people learn differently through experiencing this difference for themselves could bring a leader to develop a change process that accounts for such differences. Including the differences around how individuals hear, make sense, plan and activate themselves in the face of change.

Primary level insight is where a person understands something new and profound about themselves. They may not have the whole story but the “Ah HA!” at this level can lead to life changing processes and actions. Rather than organisational examples the human ones of falling in love, having a child, losing a parent or friend or a close encounter with death are all recognisable examples of things that can provoke **primary level** change. Education, a willing and interested mentor, travel and experiences with people or cultures different to oneself can provoke insight and change at this level.

Resistance

This model also implies that it isn't resistant people that oppose change, learning and the like rather it is normal human reluctance to shift worldviews and deeply held values.

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