DEEPENING DIALOGUE Chapter One - The Learning Self
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In Full Circles, Overlapping Lives (2000), Mary Catherine Bateson calls for a new definition of the self - not one based on what I do or know but one premised on "what I am willing to learn" (18). She writes about this new view of the self in reference to a semester she spent as a visiting professor at the historically black women's institution - Spelman College In Atlanta. She went to Spelman to teach a course on how lives and life histories vary from culture to culture, and she was pleased to be teaching at a school with a long tradition of embracing and teaching diversity. But working with young women wasn't enough for her. She wanted to teach a group that represented several generations of women, all of whom were connected to Spelman in some way. The book she writes is a chronicle of what she taught to this diverse group, but especially of what she learned from them. Bateson has come to believe that she is at her best as a teacher when she enters the classroom as a participant observer, one who is eager to learn as much as possible from her students. She thus strives to practice a set of disciplines that enhance her ability to learn. Among these disciplines are humility, wonder, curiosity and respect. When she is successful in practicing these disciplines, she finds that her learning renews her and helps her grow. Above all, she experiences a satisfying, almost spiritual fulfillment that seems to come from moving "through worlds of difference," overlapping with the lives of others in surprising, poignant and illuminating ways.

We, too, feel that we have learned the important lessons Bateson imparts. As human beings we are most distinctively human when we are learning, when we are striving to make sense of the world or to understand the experience of the people around us. The learning self is, as Bateson has said in another context, the mutable self, the self willing and eager to be changed, especially by interactions with other learners. This self is not continuous or even definable, for it is endlessly evolving, Bateson (1994) notes that "recognizing that the self is not identical through time is a first step in celebrating it as fluid and variable, shaped and reshaped by learning: (64). To live the life of the learning self is to recognize that one's identity is dynamic, never static, and that the quest to capture the essential or real self is doomed to failure. What is constant in all this change and confusion is the commitment to be open to new experience and to go on learning and growing, no matter what else may occur.

The Value of Not-Knowing

To make the fundamental shift from the knowing self to the learning self requires adopting a new way of being, one that is grounded in a state of not knowing. Learning selves begin their quest for new understanding, for acquiring new knowledge by forthrightly accepting the many things they do not yet know. This stance of not knowing creates a state of readiness for learning. It stirs in learners a wide-awake expectancy, a mindful openness to the lessons taught by the people and things around them, and encourages learners to engage in disciplined inquiry about the questions most on their minds. Not knowing promotes questions, investigation,

finding out. It is a process, a mode of interacting with the world, a habit of being more than it is a means to enhance one's content knowledge (though certainly it may contribute to that too).

A continuous process of not knowing opens us, as learners, to seeing and thinking in new ways. It helps us ground our experience in a growing awareness of all that we do not know and are eager to learn. Not knowing enlivens the learning self, fueling it with energetic curiosity to find things out and to make new connections. Not knowing liberates us to interact with ideas and knowledge through processes such as inquiry, experimentation, reflection, and revelation - all of which are dynamic dimensions of creativity. A learning self who embraces not knowing is poised for continuous learning as a creative process.

Not knowing promotes new ways of seeing that enhance our capacity to be creative. It creates space for unforeseen possibilities that help us to cross the boundaries of conventional thinking, and it supports us in thinking more imaginatively and abundantly and in spurring receptiveness to serendipity, paradox, and synchronicity. Not knowing places us in relationship - to others, to ideas, to knowledge, to the world - as the expansive context where a more profound form of learning takes place. Learning selves who begin with what they do not know are particularly struck by the value of relational learning, by the power of interdependence and human interconnectedness. A learning self who is grounded in not knowing finds generative energy in conversation where delight and disagreement take place side by side and where dialogue is used as a basic tool for creative joint inquiry.

The learning self is about energy, movement and the exchange of ideas over time. We are no longer locked into an identity shaped by our current level of knowledge. The learning self is not defined by a measured set of opinions, assumptions, judgments and knowledge bases that can encumber us as individuals and isolate us from each other. Rather, the learning self is fueled by not knowing which places the learner in a dynamic and interactive context of teaching and learning, of imparting and seeking.

Differentiation and Integration

Learning selves are constantly growing and developing, all the time becoming more complex beings. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has pointed out that learners grow more complex as a result of *a* combination of "two broad psychological processes: *differentiation and integration"* (41). Differentiation denotes specialness, a growing tendency to stand out from the rest. Integration refers to the opposite, a process of forming relationships with others, of joining together with people, ideas and things that are outside the self. Csikszentmihalyi contends that learning selves, selves that are undergoing continuous development, experience both of these phenomena simultaneously. The more one learns the more confident and distinctive one becomes. What we learn and what we are willing to learn increasingly defines who we are and what we stand for. At the same time, our uniqueness needs to be balanced by connections to other selves and acknowledgement of those others in helping us to become more distinctively human. This back and forth process of

differentiation and integration, of separating and relating, both enhances our complexity and deepens our learning. Czikszentmihalyi observes: "The self that is only differentiated-not integrated-may attain great individual accomplishments, but risks being mired in self-centered egotism. By the same token, a person whose self is based exclusively on integration will be connected and secure, but lack autonomous individuality" (42). The challenge for the learning self is to maintain this balance, to be both individuated and connected, both exceptional and an integral part of a larger whole.

We believe that the ideal setting for learning selves to make the most of both differentiation and integration is dialogue. In dialogue at its best we bring our individual distinctiveness to the circle. We speak openly and even boldly about our ideas and experiences. We expect the dialogue group to work hard at hearing what we say and to receive our ideas and our experiences in the most sympathetic way possible. We also join the dialogue circle with the assumption that we will extend to everyone else the same respect and sympathy that they have shown us. Nor will we stop there. We will do all we can to receive and to hear and to respect what is shared, and then use this "raw" and diffuse data to create a new idea, a new synthesis that builds on all that has been said, and yet is qualitatively different and grander than any one individual contribution. This creative fusing of new ideas, of forming new syntheses out of the dizzying diversity of opinion that can be found in any group, is part of the learning purpose of dialogue. We come to dialogue with our own personal notions about how the world works and enter the circle also eager to hear out others, but when things go particularly well we emerge from the circle with new insights that can't happen without setting divergent experiences side by side and "letting them speak to one another" (Bateson, 1994, 14).

Learning selves embrace difference, diversity, and multiplicity. They seek out the new, the unorthodox, the exotic. They do this, not necessarily to adopt a novel lifestyle or to change their own lives in some thoroughly radical way. They do it to add to their own fund of experience, to grow more complex, to both differentiate and integrate. Some of what is experienced in this effort to attain a higher level of complexity leaves no discernible impact at all. But some of it is absorbed into one's very being, transforming one's identity, one's sense of self and affecting as well the manner in which one interacts and collaborates with others. A gathering of learning selves, of people seeking new horizons and new understandings who are eager to share their ideas and experiences can be an exciting and powerful event. Such a prospect is ultimately what makes dialogue so enticing.

The Disciplines of the Learning Self

The dialogue circle is not only the ideal setting for learning selves to gather, it also provides excellent conditions for learning selves to grow and develop. It is one of the essential bases from which a lifetime of learning is launched and sustained. But what are the qualities of a learning self? What sets the learning self apart from others less disposed to learn? Part of the answer comes from the observations of Mary Catherine Bateson regarding the disciplines learning selves practice. She includes humility, wonder, respect, and curiosity. If we add to these empathy,

interdependence, openness, and integrity we will have a fairly complete, though not exhaustive, list of the qualities associated with learning selves. Let us examine each one in more detail. We propose doing this by first delving into those disciplines that tend to be more self-regarding, internal or individualistic. We claim these are humility, wonder, curiosity, and integrity. The second grouping of four disciplines we feel are more other-regarding, more relational and collaborative. These are respect, openness, empathy, and interdependence.

Humility – No one knows everything, and even those learners who know a great deal about a topic acknowledge that their knowledge is hopelessly partial, only a tiny fraction of what could be known or understood. Such learning selves also recognize that their knowledge is limited because of the circumscribed perspective from which they view the world. Culture, class, gender, language, sexual orientation and many other factors prevent us from seeing the whole picture in all its comprehensiveness, breadth and complexity. As a result, we look to others to fill the gaps, to lend us a somewhat more multifaceted image of the topic or problem at hand. Dialogue, of course, is the ideal forum for acquiring a fuller, more comprehensive impression, particularly when many different perspectives are represented in the group, allowing a wide range of available viewpoints to be carefully considered.

William Issacs (1999) reminds us that humility is one way to combat false certainty. This means avoiding the habit of believing that we are grasping the whole when our understanding is only partial. He urges us to accept the idea that nothing is certain except change itself, and to find meaning in the sense of motion and process that defines all of our lives. Remaining aware of the uncertainties spinning all around us and of the need to suspend our certainty, Issacs feels, allows us to see and appreciate other points of view more clearly. By suspending certainty and embracing our own limits, Issacs contends, "we can entertain multiple points of view at once, even if they are diametrically opposed or in contradiction with one another" (66-67). Humility allows us to defer to others, to hear multiple viewpoints, and to discern the wisdom found in any group willing to deliberate about its differences and search for common ground.

Parker Palmer is even more explicit about the value of humility to a learning community. He says that humility "is the virtue that allows us to pay attention to "the other" – be it student or subject – whose integrity and voice are so central to knowing and teaching in truth" (108). He also quotes Karl Deutsch to the effect that humility is an attitude, an orientation towards things outside the self. It is an "openness to experience as well as criticism...a sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs and desires of others" (quoted in Palmer, 108). Learning selves practice humility when they preserve space for "the other," for the multiple ways in which that other can instruct and enrich and illuminate one's life. Humility can literally expand the scope of one's learning.

Wonder – Learning selves retain a sense of wonder about what they learn. They are in awe of the power of knowledge and the use to which that knowledge is put. But there is also an almost reverent appreciation for learning, too, regardless of its utility. Learning can build huge bridges and send astronauts to the moon, and there is no

shortage of wonder about these things. But learning is also a way of being in the world, a love of knowledge and of enhancing understanding that does not demand any justification. It just is. Learning makes us more fully human and helps us to appreciate both the startling diversity all around us and the many marvelous ways in which this diversity is connected to some larger whole. As learners, we are in awe of complexity, of the endless differentiation that can be so stimulating and mystifying, balanced by a quest for union that also so frequently haunts us.

Experiencing wonder is akin to what Czikszentmihalyi (1990) calls loss of self-consciousness. Whether through vigorous exercise or observation of sublime elements in nature or engagement with a complex and fascinating problem, all of us have experienced not only a loss of self-consciousness but also a feeling that we are tied to something much bigger and more complex than our solitary selves. With this feeling comes a heightened awareness, not of self, but of things outside the self and the ways in which those things may be interrelated. Czikszentmihalyi says something very interesting about this experience of wonder. He describes it as a temporary absence of preoccupation with self which ironically allows us "to expand the concept of who we are." He goes on to say that this loss of self-consciousness "can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward" (64). From this experience, we come to believe that as individuals we are more powerful and more commanding, but even more important is the sense that it is only in concert with others that we are able to achieve our full potential. Czikszentmihalyi continues: "'When a person invests all her psychic energy into an interaction... she in effect becomes part of a system of action greater than what the individual self had been before. This system takes its form from the rules of the activity; its energy comes from the person's attention. But it is a real system - subjectively as real as being part of a family, a corporation, or a team - and the self that is part of it expands its boundaries and becomes more complex than what it had been" (65). It would seem that in a way our experience of wonder comes from an awestruck appreciation of what we witness, but it also comes from a mysterious but very real feeling that who we are and what we do takes on greater meaning when we interact and connect with others.

Curiosity - In their recent book The Elements of Learning, Banner and Cannon (1999) sing the praises of curiosity. For them it stands out as an indispensable quality of learning selves. They write: "Curiosity's virtue is its greed. It wonders, often indiscriminately, about everything it focuses on. Curiosity carries you, limited by time and space, beyond the immediate. It knows no boundaries, and it pushes you to learn about everything that's still unknown or unfamiliar to you" (46).

Curiosity can be all-consuming. The drive to find out, to know, to understand more fully can take over, leaving only a self who regards learning as the preeminent human activity. Curiosity is truly the sine qua non, the defining quality of the learning self. Without it, learning is impossible. With it, as Banner and Cannon say, learning knows no boundaries.

Curious people are questioners, inquirers, probers. Getting the right answer for such people is far less important than understanding the problem clearly, or appreciating

the way in which it connects to other problems. Curious people are, in John Holt's (1982) words, "problem-centered" learners as opposed to "answer-centered" learners (152). They are learners who are inclined to turn their "full intelligence on a problem, to think creatively, originally, and constructively, instead of defensively and evasively," and who in the process of inquiring into the unknown generate as many questions as they do answers and remain undaunted by the mounting uncertainties that are disclosed.

In his new book Socrates Café, Christopher Phillips (2001) captures the disposition of the curious learning self who approaches philosophy as a way to delve into the problems of everyday life and never gives up on inquiry. Philosophy in this mode attracts learners for whom "questions often reveal more about us and the world around us than answers ... in which questions often *are* the answers" (8). At the heart of the questioning and learning process that Phillips stimulates through Socratic dialogues held in many parts of the United States is a burning curiosity about the things that make life worth living. That curiosity has motivated thousands of people to join Phillips in conversation over the Big Questions of Life - the meaning of love, the value of friendship, the purpose of work, the plusses and minuses of growing old. He has found that wherever he has gone people are hungry to gather for talk, to share experiences, to question, and to grow wise together. They are above all curious about each other and the meaning of life. Significantly, they also practice many of the disciplines of learning selves - humility, wonder, respect and curiosity.

Integrity - Dialogue is a process of speaking and listening, telling and witnessing, teaching and learning. It especially emphasizes and honors cooperation, group effort, and collaborative inquiry. But it is also a process of getting outside oneself in order to strengthen one's self, of participating in a less self-centered way to gain a new perspective on the self. When we integrate ourselves into a community of learners, we do it certainly to contribute something meaningful to that community. But we also do it to renew the self, to forge an exciting new set of connections and meanings that give our individual lives new purpose and value.

It is also the case, of course, that a community of learners must build its collective strength and creativity on the individual strength and creativity of its members. As Peter Senge (1990) says with respect to organizational learning, individual learning may not guarantee that the organization learns. "But without [individual learning] no organizational learning occurs" (139). In other words, strong groups need strong individuals who maintain deep convictions and are willing to take a stand on behalf of those convictions. Learning selves are mutable selves as Bateson affirms, willing to be changed by the collaborative discourse of healthy dialogue. But they are, first of all, authentic, integral selves, not easily swayed or easily convinced, who strive to put forward the best possible support for their own beliefs.

Senge claims that one of the disciplines of learning organizations is personal mastery. Although this is in some ways a rather unfortunate and distancing term (which even Senge acknowledges), he means by it someone who is constantly developing herself, someone who approaches "one's life as a creative work" (141), someone who is open to being molded and shaped by an unyielding commitment to continuous learning.

Such persons are distinctive and unique individuals who can contribute enormously to group learning. According to Senge, the learning of these individuals is animated by two movements. "The first is continually clarifying what is important to us ... The second is continually learning how to see current reality more clearly" (141). Maintaining a balance, a "creative tension" between who we are and the contexts we find ourselves in is the essence of the integral, learning self, the person who is successfully practicing the discipline of integrity. Incidentally, this tension to which Senge refers is remarkably similar to the tension that Czikzsentmihalyi talks about with respect to complex, growing selves who are constantly moving between integration and differentiation. Indeed, one way to think about integral selves is as selves who are constantly in the process of differentiating and integrating. Senge further notes that such people share a number of characteristics. Particularly important is living "in a continual learning mode," in which one is constantly journeying, forever in process. As Senge says, "It is a lifelong discipline. People with a high level of personal mastery are acutely aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. And they are deeply self-confident Paradoxical? Only for those who do not see that the journey is the reward" (142).

Practicing the discipline of integrity obliges us to reflect on our experience and the implications of that experience for becoming our best possible selves. Integrity demands high standards and the willingness to subject ourselves to continuous self-criticism based on those standards. Indeed, one basis for such high standards and for such reflective self-assessment might be the very disciplines we describe here. Have I shown humility? Have I taken opportunities to experience a sense of wonder? Have I remained curious? Have I been respectful? Have I stayed open to new ideas? Have I connected with others empathetically? Did my actions demonstrate my commitment to interdependence? Reasonable progress toward answering all of these questions affirmatively shows reasonable progress toward the practice of integrity.

Finally, integrity implies honesty and candor. Being forthright with ourselves in reflection and with others in dialogue is a fundamental aspect of the practice of integrity.

Respect - Respect is essential to the learning self, yet it is a word so widely employed that it has degenerated into a cliché. Everyone seems to recognize the importance of respect, and yet it is a discipline that is often poorly practiced. What does it mean to show respect, to practice respect in ways that deepen the concept and that do justice to its significance and magnitude?

The root of the word respect is to regard, to look at again, to see discerningly. When we show respect for others we work diligently at seeing them clearly for who they are. We avoid labels and categories, stereotypes and stigmas. As Bill Ayers (1993) has said with respect to the students he teaches, there are certain questions we should ask ourselves about people whom we truly respect. These questions include: "Who is this person before me? What are his interests and areas of wonder? How does she express herself and what is her awareness of herself as a learner" (29)? He would also want to know of the people he respects: "What dreams do they have? What

interests or concerns them, how have they been hurt, what are they frightened of, what will they fight for, and what and whom do they care about" (28)? The point is that when we respect others we treat them as unique, distinctive individuals with experiences and interests that set them apart from others. We are bound to honor these differences and find out all we can about them, without, at the same time, intruding on their privacy. For after all, another aspect of respect is learning to accept and recognize boundaries. Only when we are doing all of these things are we showing people the respect that they deserve.

Like Ayers, William Issacs (1999) defines respect as being able "to see a person as a whole being" (110). He refers to a Zulu phrase that people use when they greet one another. It is *Sawu bona,* and it means "I see you." To the Zulus, to be seen is to bring people more fully "into existence by virtue of the fact that they are seen" (111). To say "I see you is to affirm another person's being and presence, to acknowledge her or him as a living, breathing and important human.

The more we respect others, in all of their diversity and multiplicity, the more we as learning selves can benefit and grow. It is only by seeing people as they are that we can learn from their experiences and absorb the valuable things they are prepared to teach us. Learning selves are respecting selves. They have great respect for other people, but they also respect the natural world and admire the knowledge that has been systematized in academic disciplines. Generally, they are not only in awe of the world's immense and interconnected complexity, they also grant to it their utmost respect.

Openness - Perhaps there is no discipline more basic to the learning self and to the conversing self than openness. Learning and growth are impossible without it. In a sense, it is a dimension of humility. It requires us to be humble about our knowledge and about the limits of our perspective. But openness encourages us not just to accept our limits but also to seek out the perspectives and experiences and knowledge of others in order to broaden our own viewpoint. Openness positions us as learners, as seekers of new knowledge.

When we speak of openness, the image of being open, of freely receiving new ideas and practices is important. Dogmatism or close-mindedness, has no place for those who dedicate themselves to the discipline of openness. The willingness to consider, to entertain even the most implausible or outlandish conceptions is a challenging aspect of openness. Despite the claim made by some that we have become a society of uncritical, undiscriminating individuals, the tendency to dismiss novel or unorthodox orientations remains quite common. The fact that most of us are not very good, without extensive practice, at "brainstorming" ideas, at opening ourselves up to a variety of untested possibilities is a sign that openness is not widely practiced.

Some would claim that in a democratic society we are in danger of becoming too open, of accepting without question even the most pernicious ideas and practices. Such a criticism misses the point of openness. It is not about accepting every idea that comes along, but it is about giving every idea that is expressed an honest chance to be heard and to be considered. Our quickness to close down discussion or reject

unusual notions undermines our ability to dialogue imaginatively and creatively. We must first practice the discipline of openness before we can effectively evaluate all of the ideas that emerge in conversation.

As Parker Palmer (1993) has noted, openness is linked to a stance of not knowing. At one point, he observes, "If we are to open space for knowing..., we must see that not knowing is simply the first step toward truth, that the anxiety created by our ignorance calls not for instant answers but for an adventure into the unknown. If we can affirm the search for truth as a continually uncertain journey, we may find the courage to keep the space open rather than packing it with pretense" (72). Parker makes much of the idea that an open learning space, one which is bounded and yet also highly permeable, is not just a helpful condition for seeking new knowledge and imagining new possibilities, it is a necessary starting point for learning selves unhampered by personal prejudices, unquestioned assumptions, and irrational fears.

Empathy - Learning selves yearn to understand and appreciate the experiences and feelings of others. They seek to understand what it is like to be another self, to apprehend more deeply what another self has experienced and to grasp the meaning of that experience. They strain to put themselves in the place of others and thereby to acquire some sense of what it is to be like them.

These experiences of empathizing, of putting ourselves in other persons' shoes, help us to gain new insight into the troubles and the triumphs of others. Such moments of empathy take us out of our own selves for a while and give us a new, more generous, less selfish perspective on the world. Empathizing helps us to become better listeners, assists us in being more trusting witnesses to the testimonies of our neighbors. Empathizing challenges us to imagine ourselves as an other and thereby to gain new respect for the struggles such others must bear.

The "gift of empathy" as Daniel Yankelovich calls it, is one of the things that makes dialogue work. "The ability to think someone else's thoughts and feel someone else's feelings" (43) is an ideal that we never quite attain, but the effort to approximate this goal and to make progress toward it remains a powerful component in any set of dialogic exchanges. Edgar Schein advises that one way to enhance our ability to empathize is to engage in a simple exercise he has labeled an "empathy walk". It involves finding someone whom you view as strikingly different - perhaps a homeless person or a person from a radically different culture - and then spending substantial time just being with that person and listening to what she or he has to say. Finally, Schein recommends that the experience be written down. Schein claims that anticipated differences come across as far less foreign or remote than expected. He additionally observes that the degree of convergence between seemingly unlike persons can be startling. As Issacs (1999) indicates in relating Schein's exercise, people "look for what is strange and different and discover what is held in common" (128).

Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) notes that we have a long way to go before empathy is widely accepted as a valuable vehicle for learning. But she adds with no small sense of urgency that "we must make it possible for manufacturers and politicians to

admit empathy as a legitimate, conscious discipline, thoughtful empathy as a form of knowing, leading to effective action" (141).

Interdependence - Healthy selves are unique and unrepeatable. They individuate, they diverge, they differentiate. But healthy selves are also willing parts of a whole. They collaborate, they converge, they integrate. And it is only through a process of connecting with others that we reach our fullest potential as individuals and keep that delicate balance going between differentiation and integration. To put it more simply - we cannot become the person we most want to be without the many others who help us, support us, teach us, and sustain us. In fact, we can't even conceive of such a personal ideal without the help of those around us. We are utterly dependent on others, and there is a very real sense in which the identity we claim for ourselves is unreachable without the continuous presence and influence of the significant others - both near and remote, both known and unimagined - who render our lives meaningful.

In his influential book Collaborative Learning Kenneth Bruffee (1993) introduces the term the "craft of interdependence." By it he means the process of learning the language and procedures associated with various knowledge communities by interacting actively with others through small group dialogue, joint projects, problem based inquiry, cooperative research, and other such collaborative means. Craft implies that it is a discipline that can be learned over time, and interdependence assumes that by constructing knowledge with other people we can gain a deeper and more enduring understanding of the material to be learned than could ever be achieved by an individual working alone. Indeed, the "craft of interdependence" is not just a reference to a more efficient way to learn, it is a claim about knowledge itself. Bruffee argues that in the real world, that is anywhere but in the institution called school, we take it for granted that learning is by its very nature collaborative and that knowledge creation necessarily occurs within a community of scholars or knowers. Dialogue can be viewed as one important way by which we talk ourselves into deeper understanding and new knowledge. Learning selves thus assume that we live unavoidably in an interdependent world where the learning that matters most occurs in groups or in communities of learners.

Bruffee also observes insightfully that the craft of interdependence and the commitment to collaborative knowing require us to grant authority to our peers, and courage "to accept the authority granted to one by peers" (24). Trust and courage are two easily overlooked qualities that are essential to cooperative learning and mutually enlightening dialogue. When we practice the craft of interdependence, we look to each person in the group as a potential expert whose knowledge or experience deserves the same respect and attention as any esteemed text. Unless we assume or trust that each person in the group, along with the group as a whole, can instruct us and give us new insight into the topic to be explored, we can't progress very far in practicing the discipline of interdependence. Similarly, we must have the courage to take responsibility for instructing, guiding, supporting others in their learning. Without this courage to follow through, to assume responsibility for helping others, the craft of interdependence is undermined. There is something marvelously empowering and rather daunting about the craft of interdependence. It is based on the assumption that

the members of the group are in a position to decide for themselves how they will go about learning together. It does not rule out the teacher. In fact, the teacher may continue to be a valuable resource. But the teacher is no longer the final arbiter or in control of the learning process. Under interdependence, that control transfers to the group itself, leaving the group with only itself to blame if learning does not occur. Furthermore, when everyone commits to the discipline of interdependence, the only limits facing learners are the ones that learners impose on themselves. The practice of interdependence offers learners an exciting opportunity to learn from each other and most of all to create something new out of the crucible of collaboration.

Conclusion

Learning is one of the things that most sharply defines us as human beings. It makes us feel more vital and alert, and lends meaning to the simplest of actions and the most modest of thoughts. It reminds us of our nearly unlimited capacity for growth, on the one hand, and, on the other, of how partial and uncertain most of our knowledge actually is. The learning self is an individual struggling for clarity and self-understanding, but also a member in good standing of the community of learners. The quest for self-knowledge depends on our being active participants in such a learning community, and on recognizing that most of the things worth knowing are learned through collaboration with other learners. We do not in the least underestimate the value of growing as an individual knower and learner, but we also affirm that learning is, at its highest and most complex levels, an interdependent process. And as an interdependent process, learning is most richly and excitingly and enduringly attained through dialogue.

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