Managing and Maintaining Learner Conflict through Dialogue: The Transformative Opportunities of Academic Support Services

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Abstract:

Academic support and development services provide an important and unique opportunity for students, instructors, learning specialists, departments, and institutions to come together in dialogue to create curricular and extracurricular programs focused on furthering and deepening student learning. In particular, these dialogically-based programs provide students the space to discover, identify, and name interpersonal and intrapersonal learning conflict. These points of conflict—identified in this article as Learner Conflict—are often destructive and unproductive. From our experience, however, with the implementation of dialogue and academic support and development programming, these negative types of conflict can be transformed into positive and productive forms that strengthen student learning. Examples of this conflict-focused dialogue are provided from three layers of academic support and development programming—supplemental, integrated, and embedded—created and conducted at the University of Guelph. Building on this understanding of the transformative opportunities of both dialogue and of conflict, this article discusses the importance of fostering a form of dialogue that not only welcomes conflict, but also supports, manages, maintains, and transforms it.

Key Words:

Dialogue; transformative learning; academic support and development; conflict; Learner Conflict; Learning Commons.
“Everything began with the pedagogy of dialogue.”

Moacir Gadotti (1996)

Introduction

For Paulo Freire (2002), dialogue—when conducted with a dedication to truly engaging with others—has the ability to break the hierarchical relationship between students and teachers and disrupt the ‘banking model’ of education. This form of dialogue also has the potential to transform educational settings to horizontal networks of co-learners (rather than vertical structures premised on the roles of “the-teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher”) and leads to a learning environment where all involved “become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire, 2002, p. 80). Freire is quick to point out that this dialogue must be an “act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another,” and that “it cannot exist...in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people” (Freire, 2002, p. 89). In addition to love, this dialogue is also premised on humility, belief in the dialogical process, faith in people, mutual trust, hope, a willingness to continually engage with others, and critical thinking (Freire, 2002, pp.89-90).

This approach to dialogue is also premised on the potential for transformation of all who engage in the process. “Dialogue,” Moacir Gaddotti wrote, “is not just the encounter of two subjects who look for the meaning of things—knowledge—but an encounter which takes place in praxis—in action and reflection—in political engagement, in the pledge for social [and personal] transformation. A dialogue that does not lead to transformative action is pure verbalism” (Gadotti, 1996, p. xi). Through this dialogue, individuals have the opportunity to transform themselves as a learner and as a person—to experience a deep structural shift in thought and action1—through dialogical encounters with themselves, their peers, their curriculum, and academic support staff. This transformative dialogical process, however, is never neutral, and more often than not, is also linked with some form, level, or type of conflict. As Gadotti (1996, p. xvi) further argued,

educating presupposes a transformation, and there is no kind of peaceful transformation. There is always conflict and rupture with something, with for instance, prejudices, habits, types of behaviours, and the like...We are not always willing to confront the conflict. We are not always willing to take on the onus of involving ourselves with the risks that accompany our taking part...The [true] educator [or student] is he or she who doesn’t remain indifferent and neutral when faced with reality. He or she tries to intervene and learn with the changing reality. Thus, conflict is at the heart of all pedagogy.

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1 This is similar to the definition of transformative education offered by Edmund O’Sullivan, Mary O’Connor, and Amish Morrel (2002, p. xvii): “Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.”
From this perspective, conflict can be understood as a positive, productive, and much-needed aspect of learning, and a frontier where deep and transformative learning can occur. Yet, conflict can also be negative and unproductive, leading to the breakdown of dialogue, learning environments, and educational opportunities for students.

As academic learning and development specialists, we had observed the transformative and productive role that conflict could play in learning, and believed in the importance of encouraging students to face points of conflict—whether intrapersonal or interpersonal—in order to deepen the learning process. Yet, we were also aware of the destructive and unproductive potential of conflict when left unchecked. As such, we began searching for ways to incorporate explicit discussions about conflict within our academic support and development programming. Our intentions were to provide the spaces and opportunities where students could identify, confront, and engage with conflict, while being encouraged to maintain the conflict in a productive and meaningful way.

Building on this understanding of the transformative opportunities of both dialogue and conflict, this article discusses the importance of fostering a form of dialogue that not only welcomes conflict, but also supports, manages, maintains, and transforms it. For this article, the potential for this type of conflict-focused dialogue is illustrated through examples from academic support and development programming, and is united with a concept we define as Learner Conflict (the conflict that is experienced within learning-related contexts that can be productive or destructive) to examine the transformative opportunities of using and supporting productive conflict in individual and group learning within and without the classroom.

Background: Academic Learning and Development Programming

This research and work was conducted through the Learning Commons at the University of Guelph, a large comprehensive university situated in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. Located in the main campus Library, our Learning Commons recognizes the role of the Library as a central location for learning and curriculum support. The Library provides a unique environment for students to study, engage in writing and research, and learn in collaborative settings. Within this setting, students can access services to enhance reading, studying, time management, and writing skills; attend facilitated study groups; access computers and information technology support; and receive research assistance from a librarian.

Learning Services, the section of the Learning Commons in which we both worked at the time of writing, provides assistance and support to students at all levels—from first year to doctoral candidates—who want to enhance their skills and performance and achieve their intellectual potential, as well as to faculty and staff who wish to implement programs and services to support and enhance their students’ learning. Through our unit, specific programming models and curricula are developed to meet the needs of a variety of learning cultures that exist at the university, such as academically at-risk students, students in professional academic programs, student athletes, high-achieving students, and highly-involved students. Learning Services also provides individual and small group assistance and consultations, a myriad of academic programming,
workshops, and print and Web-based resources on a range of skills and learning issues, including the transition from high school to university-level learning, time management and controlling procrastination, presentation and speaking skills, learning in large lectures, critical reading and learning from texts, concentration and memory enhancement, and working in groups.

When creating resources or developing academic programming, the Learning Commons has developed a distinct theoretical framework that guides the delivery of all services. This framework is based on research in learning assistance programs, the Supplemental Instruction Program model, and information literacy (Schmidt and Kaufman, 2007). This approach to providing academic and learning support services follows a three-tiered program delivery model: supplemental, integrated, and embedded programming (Schmidt and Kaufman, 2007; Cunsolo Willox and Lackeyram, 2009). Supplemental programming is focused on creating learning and support opportunities outside of the classroom setting. These services are provided through individual or small-group consultations, learning resources (print and web-based), and voluntary extra-curricular learning workshops. Integrated programs are specially-designed sessions created in consultation with faculty and teaching assistants (TAs). They are specifically structured to address one or more learning objectives tailored to the course, department, or discipline. Embedded services are also created in collaboration with faculty, departments, curriculum committees, and TAs, but move further by embedding specific learning tools, strategies, supports, and pedagogical approaches within the classroom, the curriculum, and in some cases the institutional setting of the department (Schmidt and Kaufman, 2007; Cunsolo Willox and Lackeyram, 2009).

Each of these three levels of programming is person- and context-specific, taking into consideration the myriad personal and academic factors that affect learning. This academic programming is also premised on continued dialogue between and among students, academic support providers, instructors, faculty, and curriculum. When designing or delivering these types of academic support and development programs, it is important to ensure that these programs remain separate from remediation support and counseling services. The separation of these types of programs from remediation has allowed Learning Services to roam freely along the curriculum conduit between learner and faculty. As such, Learning Services neither steals nor co-opts content from faculty, nor does it present a “you don’t know enough” approach to learners; rather, our programs utilize content in a manner that removes the focus from “getting the right answer,” and moves it more toward the underlying individual conflicts in order to fuel learning.

Additionally, by focusing on ways to support student learning separated from counseling services (although our unit works closely with the counseling unit on campus), this type of programming allows students to confront academic content and conflict in an environment that is not focused on ‘fixing,’ but rather on furthering and deepening learning. This movement away from remediation and counselling, combined with the three-tiered service-delivery framework, allows for infinite possibilities for engaging the learner, faculty/curriculum, and the program, as well as allowing the students to directly influence their learning and the curriculum via dialogical encounters. These programs are also created with an understanding that learning is a process, and
that each individual can always improve, hone, or enhance the skill-set and academic skills that he or she possesses at any point through their academic career.

**Conflict and Dialogue: Transformative Possibilities of Academic Support and Development**

Throughout the years of creating and conducting academic and learning support services through these three tiers, one key component always emerged: conflict. At all levels of engagement—be it curricula, programmatic, course-based, individually, or small group—learners consistently came to points of conflict when making meaning of their academic involvement. While some of these instances of conflict were reported explicitly or directed to specific academic interactions (e.g., not knowing how to extract information from a textbook), many other underlying aspects of conflict were deeper, such as “Why is this information important for me to learn?” or “Why do I lack confidence when working with groups or others in my class?” Whether individual or group, inter-personal or intra-personal, conscious or unconscious, conflict always played a mediating role in the learning process of students, and as we continued with our programming, in the creation of our learning support pieces. We came to define this conflict as Learner Conflict:

a rupture of one’s habits, perceptions, skills, patterns, and beliefs about one’s self, one’s learning, and one’s context in the world. This rupture presents a choice: one can ignore the conflict or one can confront the conflict and acknowledge, manage, maintain, and advance it. Indeed, in order for transformation to occur, one must be willing to confront this conflict and by engaging in the process of critical self-assessment, reflection, and re-assessment, act upon it (Cunsolo Willox and Lackeyram, 2009, p. 4).

This understanding of Learning Conflict can be mobilized through a Freirian approach to dialogue and through dialogical encounters that respect and consent to authentic otherness, that are spontaneous, and not scripted, that deconstruct pre-conceived knowledge imbalances, that foster and encourage critical co-investigation, that do not demand sameness nor universality of language, and that do exclude conflict (Cunsolo Willox, 2006). From this perspective, then, Learner Conflict can be encouraged, supported, and maintained and has the potential to become a positive and transformative mechanism in the learning process.

How, then, can this understanding of Learner Conflict—with a focus on dialogue—be mobilized both within and without the classroom to provide the opportunity for learners to actively engage with their interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict to transform not only their learning, but also the point of conflict itself once it is no longer needed for the learning process? From our experience, it is through the creation and provision of academic support and development programming aimed at creating educational environments where conflict was welcomed and supported, and that attempted to create opportunities for dialogical encounters emphasizing horizontal relationships, mutual trust, active engagement and faith in the process.
Supplemental Programming

As was mentioned above, supplemental programming focuses on generic learning, writing, and research skills. These programs are implemented by Learning Services through workshops and seminars, one-to-one support, on-line and printed resources, and sessions for particular student groups (mature students, students in residence, Diploma students). To illustrate the ways in which this type of programming can foster, manage, and maintain Learner Conflict, this section will focus on the use of dialogue in individual and small-group learning consultations (both one-time and on-going).

Each semester, more than 200 students come to Learning Services for learning consultations—individual meetings that occur between learning specialist staff members and students—when they have hit a point of personal and/or academic conflict. These students attend consultations when they realized—consciously or unconsciously—that they had hit a point where this conflict was destructive, and that they required the opportunity to discuss with someone what their point of conflict was (or at least, what they thought it was) and to gain new knowledge and perspectives and acquire new skill-sets in order to productively deal with the issues. These consultations are structured to provide the environment where students can assess where they are at that moment in time and reflect upon what they would like to do and where they would like to go in the future. While learning consultations provide the opportunity for students to confront their conflict through dialogical encounters, they also provide the ability for learning support staff members not only to relieve conflict, but also to encourage and maintain it in a productive and transformative way.

There are several major differences between one-time and on-going consultations. First, on-going consultations allow for the student to witness first-hand the progress that he or she has made. Through inter- and intra-personal dialogue, these regular meetings provide a continued opportunity for change and growth. Second, on-going consultations require a greater level of accountability and responsibility between the student and the staff member with whom they are continually meeting and in dialogue. This accountability is different from that between students and instructors and/or TAs, as there are no marks attached to these consultations, they are not embedded within course requirements, and they are often characterized by a more gritty and honest appraisal of the point of conflict they are experiencing. Finally, on-going consultations also allow students the time to assess where they currently stand as a learner and an individual, and after trying out new skills and behaviours, return and reflect upon their accomplishments, and re-assess their goals in light of these new developments. This cycle of critical self-assessment and re-assessment is greatly enhanced by the dialogical encounters between the staff member and the student. These dialogical encounters evolve as uniquely crafted environments where a learner is capable of exposing the range of her/his intelligence and how she/he crafts meaning of their academic experience, without fear of recrimination.

This is not to say that these processes cannot, nor have not, occurred in one-time consultations, for indeed, one-time consultations provide the opportunity for students to

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2 It is important to note that while we see many students in conflict, not all students who experience types of conflict in their learning seek help through academic support and development opportunities.
check in, identify, and face their point of conflict; in so doing, learners begin to understand their conflict and develop the skills and strategies to utilize and advance it. For example, a common misconception made by many students about their time management occurs when they say, “I do not know how to write this exam.” Through dialogue, we discover, as is usually the case that the student is quite capable of writing an essay or answering a multiple choice question, and that their point of conflict actually stems from another area or issue. More often than not in these situations, a one time opportunity for the student to identify, assess, and improve their time usage is sufficient to move the destructive form of conflict into a more productive and positive, thereby using their Learner Conflict for personal transformation. While on-going consultations do afford greater depth and breadth in these areas and allow for a greater rapport between the students and staff members, it is important to note that in many cases a one-time consultation may be all a student requires to deal with a particular conflict and continue along with their learning process.

To illustrate, the following conversation is a snippet of a dialogue experienced, via email, between a Learning Services staff member and one of his on-going student consultations:

**Staff member:** Thanks for the email and the update. …As for this outline...I thought it was really well written (good narrative voice) but that is good for me i.e. someone not too familiar with the topic. In your paper you present some examples…are you hoping to compare their interpretations i.e. what is similar or different…interested in reading your answers to some of the questions you posed …so are you going to conclude by highlighting strengths or gaps? So how are you coming along with getting this done?

**Student:** Your comments on the outline are exactly what I feel is missing as well, though I am encouraged to hear that at least what I have written makes sense. I've taken the last few weeks off from it….so I hope to be able to work on the paper within the next couple of days.

There are several things that stand out about this dialogical encounter: first, it is taking place between two individuals who are dedicated to and engaged in the learning process—the dialogue flows from the staff member to the student, then back again; second, neither individual is responsible for assessing the mark outcome of the other; third, there is an apparent element of accountability between the student and the staff member; and finally, there is an ease and comfortableness, as well as a high degree of accessibility, in the dialogue that allows the student to openly and honestly share that she has taken a few weeks off from her paper (something she may not feel comfortable conveying to her faculty members).

Additionally, the student and the academic support and development programmer are engaged in continual dialogue, allowing for a back-and-forth encounter that continually challenges her writing, her assumptions, and her academic arguments—in short, this dialogical encounter is providing the opportunity for the student to continually engage with her Learner Conflict while engaging in the process of critical self-assessment, reflection, and re-assessment. During the dialogue that occurs in a consultation, students are often confronted by this conflict, and as such, have the
opportunity to witness and recognize it. This recognition allows the point of conflict to be removed from within the student and placed staunchly in front of him or her for examination, assessment, and re-evaluation. This process of having the opportunity for the students to face her/himself, both on the inside and the out, by calling the point of conflict forward is a very powerful moment, as often the student is meeting his or her conflict for the first time. Once it is witnessed, the students are provided with the opportunity to engage with the more destructive form of conflict, and can be named, reclaimed, and transformed. By providing the environment and the opportunity for students to engage with, maintain, and move through their points of Learner Conflict through dialogical encounters, the students can continue to grow, progress, renew, and transform in their learning and in their lives.

**Integrated Programming**

As was mentioned above, integrated programming pieces are specially-designed sessions tailored to a particular discipline or cohort of students. Our department conducts a number of on-going integrated programming that focus on establishing points of reciprocal dialogue between faculty/curriculum and learning specialists, and learning specialists and students in order to engage, support, maintain, and transform Learner Conflict.

Nine years ago, the course coordinator of a two-semester first-year science course (with an average enrolment of three 500-person sections) approached Learning Services in search of programming that would provide student learning support to a historically challenging curriculum. After discussion and consultation with the course instructors, a detailed survey of the curriculum, and some research into the characteristics of the cohort of students in the course, our unit created two integrated programming pieces, connected to the course and endorsed by the instructors and the department: a workshop on writing and learning from multiple choice exams, and the processes and skills involved in creating and presenting a poster presentation.

The workshop on multiple choice questions was created in partnership between Learning Services and the course instructors, uniting instructor-designed and approved multiple choice questions and error analyses and answers for each example question with learning research on effective ways to study for and take multiple choice questions. This allowed the students who attended the workshop the opportunity to simulate the experience of answering the types and levels of multiple choice questions that they would face on their exam, while simultaneously gaining insight into their learning processes and effective study and exam-writing strategies.

Within the workshop, students were first introduced to some problem-solving strategies for confronting and answering multiple choice questions, and with these skills in hand, were given twelve minutes (one minute per question) to answer some sample questions under exam conditions. After the twelve minutes were completed, the students had the opportunity, through dialogue with the learning specialist running the workshop, to go through each question, discuss particular strategies to approach this question, and receive additional advice and guidance from the staff member. Students were also provided with the complete error analysis for each question, for further reference after the workshop. This combination of faculty-created questions, answers,
and error analyses with learning strategies effectively moves the focus of the workshop away from the academic content and more toward the process and the approach taken for each question.

At the end of the workshop, students complete an evaluation on the workshop, commenting on how they felt the workshops assisted with their academic development, and what they felt was the most valuable skill they learned at the workshops. The majority of students relayed that “taking the mini quiz” was extremely useful, as it provided the opportunity not only to simulate an exam situation, but also to show the types of questions that the instructor was likely to ask. Many students also expressed that “going over each question in the quiz and analyzing the answers” was incredibly useful, as it showed them “different ways to study for multiple choice exams,” and displayed the many “strategies for studying for and answering multiple choice questions” that exist. Other students found the exercise of “identifying important features of each question” valuable, as it was important in “making the students aware of how to eliminate useless info and pick out obvious answers/make the question simple.”

During the second semester of the course, a new assignment was introduced: a group research project that required researching and choosing two scholarly articles, compiling and summarizing this knowledge, clearly and succinctly presenting this knowledge in poster form, and formally presenting this poster to classmates, instructors, and TAs. The instructors wanted to provide an opportunity for the students to learn tangible skills (poster making and presenting) that as up-and-coming scientists would be useful to their future academic and career goals. In order to provide this opportunity effectively, the course instructors and our unit recognized the need to create an academic support programming piece that provided the platform for students to actually develop and acquire the skills to successfully approach the poster assignment. A workshop was designed to assist students in learning the fundamentals of poster design and layout in the sciences, as well as ways to distil their research findings down to content suitable for posters. Students were also shown course approved posters from previous years in order to ascertain what was expected of them.

Similar experiences were reported by the students who attended the poster presentation (many of which had attended the multiple-choice workshop from the previous semester and found the content relevant and the information valuable supporting learning). The majority of students found that “going through each part in our poster that we need to do and explaining what we should do,” was very valuable, and most felt that they were able to utilize “the practical visual suggestions,” particularly concerning “poster lay-out—colour and spacing.” Many students also reported that hearing “tips from past students” really helped to put the project into the context of the course and curriculum, as well as providing a student perspective, and validity to the techniques presented the workshop.

In addition, many students also found the “discussion on presentation styles and how to answer questions”—particularly “ways to work around difficult questions”—very valuable. Many students self-reported that the presentation component of the poster assignment was what was causing the most internal conflict. By sharing these concerns within a group setting and realizing that many of their peers feel exactly the same way,
students were given the opportunity to identify and voice their point of conflict within a setting that also assisted with the enhancement and expansion of skills required to manage and maintain this point of conflict to advance learning and knowledge gathering.

From the above example, we can see that integrated programming extends the flow of dialogue beyond that seen in supplemental programming (reciprocal dialogue between learning staff and students) to include faculty/curriculum (reciprocal dialogue between faculty/curriculum and learning staff, and between the learning staff and the students). By engaging with so many people—from classmates, to faculty members, to professional staff—as well as with the curriculum and with their own learning approaches, students face a myriad of opinions, ideas, and skills.

This engagement with the curriculum—through a platform of the transfer of new skills and knowledge—allows the students to grapple with course material in an environment that fosters dialogue and welcomes conflict (be it intra- or inter-personal), all while providing tangible skills that can be mobilized in their future learning experiences. Through a dialogical process between and among students, academic support and development staff, and course instructors, these workshops provide the opportunity for students to recognize and confront both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict, and to begin to move through their own points of Learner Conflict. These integrated programming pieces also provide the opportunity for students not only to engage with their Learner Conflict, but also to maintain it within a supportive learning environment in order to further their learning.

**Embedded Programming**

As the final category in the Learning Commons theoretical framework for programming, embedded programming extends integrated programming: while still focusing on creating learning tools, strategies, and supports (in collaboration with faculty, departments, TAs, and curriculum committees), these programming pieces actually become part of the curriculum of particular programs or areas by ‘embedding’ these student learning support pieces directly into the curriculum.

In 2000, there was a change of curriculum in one of the four-year professional programs at our university. This change migrated the curriculum away from a 12-week semestered program to a case-based approach to learning, heavy in group work, which comprised of year-long courses. This change in course structure and content also carried a change in assessment, as well as a change in the classroom environment, interaction, and structure. For the first time, students were placed in pre-assigned groups within which they would remain for a portion of their program to learn, study, and complete assignments. While a great deal of discussion occurred around the pedagogy of making these substantial changes, the impacts on student learning were not explicitly anticipated or easy to forecast. In many cases, curriculum was created or re-designed without taking into consideration the impact on learners from a learner’s perspective, and/or without the input from the learners it will be affecting.

When the new curriculum was introduced, the college wanted to ensure that appropriate student learning support pieces were included in the course content to help
the students through the transition to this new curriculum. As such, through collaboration with the faculty at the college and the staff at the Learning Commons, several workshops on managing conflict in group learning, learning and studying in groups, and writing specific professional exams were created. In addition, student panels were set up to encourage reciprocal student dialogue between the years, and individual or group consultations were made available for those who were experiencing destructive and unproductive conflict.

Student feedback was very important in informing and creating the academic support and development programming embedded in the curriculum. For example, after the first series of workshops, one student commented in the formal evaluations:

I think it is an excellent idea to continue fostering group work and dividing up tasks—the session to discuss what seems to work and what doesn't work was helpful. As well, input from (senior) students was invaluable help. However, this needs to occur early in the year so that we can optimize our study time and not try to change habits a week before the test. Many of us sat there thinking, ‘Gee, if I had known this in October I wouldn't be in such a squeeze right now.'

Two important developments occurred based on this type of student feedback: first, faculty began the necessary discussions to make sessions available to additional students in other years. As one faculty responded after this feedback, “From everything I heard the session was excellent…The first year students were wondering if you might be able to put on a similar session for them around the integrated courses and the second years would be willing to assist.” Second, the direct feedback from the learners was used to inform the curriculum itself, and the students were able to inform the curriculum in a manner that provided opportunities for dialogue to discuss issues with the course and inter- and intra-personal conflict. These workshops were directly embedded in the curriculum of subsequent years; that is, they were run directly in the classroom as part of a course, rather than outside of class time and space. These sessions have also evolved to include a number of regularly occurring dialogical opportunities between more-senior and less-senior students, and faculty and students throughout the entire program.

It is important to emphasize that these changes came directly from the impact of the students and that they change the curriculum to provide engagement opportunities for the next iteration of attendees. As such, embedded programming goes one step further than integrated programming and closes the final gap in the loop: reciprocal dialogue now flows between faculty/curriculum and learning staff, between learning staff and students, and between students and faculty/curriculum. This enhanced reciprocal dialogue allows for the learners to confront their points of Learner Conflict and maintain it within an institutionally-sanctioned, academic support and development-created, structurally-embedded programming piece. This structure also allows each individual the opportunity to transform unproductive or destructive types of conflict into more productive forms, and to maintain this more positive conflict to expand, enhance, and deepen their learning.
Bringing it Together

There are multiple ways in which learners, curriculum, and related services can be transformed in the academic setting. In the case of Learning Services, these are accomplished through three main ways: direct interaction with the learner (supplemental); interaction with the learner as prescribed by curriculum and/or faculty (integrated); and finally, by transforming the reciprocal interaction(s) among learner, curriculum, faculty/staff, and learning programming (embedded). Ultimately, whether supplemental, integrated, or embedded programming, through these processes, students are provided with the opportunity to engage in dialogical encounters with themselves, their peers, professional staff and faculty members, the curriculum, and with their learning. These dialogical processes are never neutral, and as a result, provide the opportunity for students to grapple with conflict—specifically their points of Learner Conflict—in order to confront their conflict, transform destructive components, and maintain the tension of productive conflict to further learning. This transformation of conflict, fueled by dialogue, allows for the establishment of the cycles of critical self-assessment and re-assessment, and affirmation and re-affirmation to occur, to be maintained, and to be advanced.

As instructors and academic support and development programmers, our own personal Learner Conflict rests with continuously adapting to ever-changing learners, curriculum, knowledge, institutional structures, and classroom structures, and to assessing and re-assessing the way(s) in which we choose to deliver our service(s). Our programming models may be theoretically defined, but the service delivery models must continue to weave the intricate web of dialogue that creates, supports, and maintains conflict, allowing for this conflict to thrive, be identified, be acted upon, and thus be transformed.

Concluding Thoughts...

Academic support and development programming provides the opportunity to engage students in various forms of dialogical encounters—encounters that understand and encourage students to confront their own points of Learner Conflict. Through these dialogical encounters, learners are able to confront their conflict, name it, call it before them, and transform it. These encounters provide the opportunity for learners to find a new ‘way towards’ their goals, and a new ‘way to becoming’ in the world. Through dialogue that maintains Learner Conflict, learners are able to re-visit and reflect upon their previously held beliefs about themselves and the world, and re-examine their skill-sets, knowledge, and position in the process of learning. In short, it is an affirmation and re-affirmation of who and what the learners are at that moment, and a glimpse of who and what they will become. This affirmation and re-affirmation—a reclamation of the personal and the exterior, if you will—simply cannot be achieved without Learner Conflict, without being on that edge of newness, of chaos, and of transformation. This dialogue and this conflict inevitably lead to praxiological actions—actions of reclamation, reflection, re-affirmation, and transformation.
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