4 Learning processes

in which I describe the development of democratic and experiential learning processes using a process of continuous improvement; I then identify some principles for the design of learning processes, including robust processes

In the first half of the chapter I introduce the documents I have written on learning processes. These are considered in four groups:

- descriptions and analyses of university classes
- papers on the design of learning activities
- examples of learning designs
- documents on the design of overall university programs.

From these documents I then draw some conclusions about learning processes, and their design and facilitation. Finally, I consider the implications for the design and facilitation of robust processes.

University classes

Much of my facilitation has been directed towards learning processes. Despite this they account for a relatively small amount of my writing. There is an early monograph, *Mechanisms for democracy in learning* (henceforth *Mechanisms*).

Paper 05 — Mechanisms for democracy

Bob Dick (1989) *Mechanisms for democracy in learning: some reflections on continuing experiments on democracy in the tertiary classroom*, second edition. Chapel Hill, Qld.: Interchange.

This monograph describes in some detail two university classes. Each of the classes exhibits high levels of participation and involvement. There is a strong emphasis on experiential learning as a way of integrating theory and practice. The ways in which the participation is achieved are discussed.

The central theme of the monograph is "arousal without anxiety". The classes expect of participants a high level of responsibility. Also, accustomed to other classes where the content is predetermined, some participants experience my classes as "unstructured". The result can be anxiety. Many of the developments in the class during the early years were directed towards alleviating the anxiety without diluting the relevance, challenge or excitement.

The paper describes the learning processes I use in the classroom. The title was intended as an echo of Trevor Williams' 1975 monograph *Democracy in learning*.

Mechanisms describes how I had resolved the problems he encountered when he tried to introduce more classroom democracy. (So had he, as I later found when we met at a conference.)

I describe development of the classes as having four phases:

1 In the earliest years the learners helped to decide course content. In many other respects the class was traditional, though sessions that a colleague and I ran were a mix of lectures and activities.

2 Learner involvement increased. Class members ran some class sessions, mostly in the form of lectures.

3 A colleague and I gave more attention to ways of involving learners in helping choose the processes used in the class. In response the participants gave more attention to the process as well as the content, and participation increased further.

4 Participation increased yet again. More explicit review mechanisms were developed. Roles and responsibilities were more explicitly negotiated.

From phase four onward there has been continuous fine tuning. Attention has been given to making assessment more about learning and less about grades. Processes for review and for reflection have developed further. The current shape of the class is illustrated by the course description given to learners in 2002, the last year in which I convened this course. I've included this as Appendix 1 at the end of this explication. Examples of assignment feedback criteria are given in Appendices 2 and 3.

Here is a view from participants. Class members wrote the following on their own initiative as part of an honours year "survival manual" for distribution to following cohorts.

> *"You can get whatever you want from this course. This subject is unique at Uni. The learning is mostly implicit. It is meant to be! If at first you find you are not getting what you want, hang in there!*

"The course is living practice of what you are learning and the processes can be generalised to other places.

"Professionalism demands an internal locus of control and this course gives you the opportunity to develop that.

"The key is action, so get involved because it is worth it. Take risks and speak up because this class provides a rare opportunity to do so. It gives you a safety net just in case. It is OK to fail here.

"This is a 28 credit point subject, the same as the thesis, so don't treat it lightly. Start everything early or it will snowball—most importantly, think about everything early and talk to the class.

"The course content differs from year to year because the class members decide what content to include, and actually run the classes — a great learning experience.

"The assessment is basically only on the major assignment but there are other requirements which are graded. These can be negotiated. Of these, the action project provides valuable experience in the field. The mentors enable you to build up a network outside, before you act there. So take the opportunity to meet with a mentor early.

"This is a great course — do it!!!"

Three other papers included here are about the same fourth year course. The next one of them is an invited paper "Educating the change agents" (paper 06), henceforth *Change agents*. It describes the same learning processes with the benefit of a little more hindsight.

Paper 06 — Educating the change agents

Bob Dick (1991) Educating the change agents. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 13(2), 139-152.

This journal article describes the same highly-participative university class in "social consultancy". The emphasis is on the change skills which participants acquire. In this paper the course is identified as a self-improving system in which a design goal is "arousal without anxiety". It is also described as a self-improving system in which participants develop skills in self-management and courage through their involvement in decisions which carry real consequences.

One emphasis of the paper is on the review and improvement processes built into the course design. This foreshadows some issues I'll return to in later chapters. A second emphasis identifies "arousal without anxiety" as one of the goals of the course design.

In my early experience as a facilitator of learning I assumed (mistakenly, I now believe) that learning does not easily happen without discomfort. This reflected the difficulties I had in achieving more democratic processes. Edgar Schein has expressed similar views in an interview with Diane Coutu (2002:104):

> [Coutu:] Is there some way to promote learning without all the blood, sweat, and tears?
>
> [Schein:] No, because there's an inherent paradox surrounding learning: Anxiety inhibits learning, but anxiety is also necessary if learning is going to happen at all.

I now believe that it is not *anxiety* which is necessary. It is *arousal*. Anxiety is an easy way of increasing arousal — but not the only way. An increasingly common view (expressed, for instance, by Luciano Mariani, 1997) is that challenge can be balanced with support. The support reduces the anxiety without lessening the arousal.

There is evidence that this is true at all levels of education. In a recent review of research into exemplary schools (Hendricks, 2001), support and challenge formed two of the eight criteria identified.

The class as described in paper 06 also illustrates how complex skills similar to what Daniel Goleman (1995) calls "emotional intelligence" can be learned using experiential methods. In doing this I was inspired by a model I learned from Ed Schein in 1980 and which strangely anticipates Goleman's now fashionable work.

In the class, one of my goals was to create an environment in which participants had opportunities to learn "emotional skills". [1] By this I mean the skills to make difficult decisions under conditions of uncertainty, and take responsibility for the consequences.

On the basis of this experience I would now maintain that challenging and complex skills can be learned. The class processes for assisting this learning can be designed and managed by novices.

Some of the lessons from these experiences in the tertiary classroom were applied to management learning in an invited paper included in the book *Management development in Australia* (Smith, 1991). The chapter was called "Democracy for learners" (henceforth *Democracy*).

Paper 07 — Democracy for learners

Bob Dick (1991) Democracy for learners. In B. Smith, ed., *Management development in Australia*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich [pp 140-148].

1. Edgar H. Schein, 1980, personal communication.
To my knowledge, Schein has not written up the model which he discussed with participants and staff at a management development course in 1980. He described management skills as consisting of three categories. The first he called "technical": for instance, how to read a balance sheet. Management, he explained, was about achieving through others. Technical skills are of little use for *management* unless the manager makes use of an adequate level of interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills depend in turn on "emotional skills" — for instance the ability to make difficult decisions under conditions of uncertainty and to take responsibility for the consequences.

Classroom experiences in democratic learning designs are here described, and then applied to management learning. Important strategies identified here include:

- building relationships and establishing support mechanisms, including widespread use of small groups and pairs
- giving attention to feedback and evaluation
- using "standard packages" as a starting point for negotiation, to reduce initial uncertainty, as a vehicle to carry learning from one cohort to the next, and as a safety net to which anyone could return if their negotiated assessment didn't work out
- finding ways of making the learning visible.

The paper again offers "arousal without anxiety" as a worthy goal for educational and other learning situations.

In *Democracy* I list several ways in which support can be increased. The result, as Mariani (1997) also reported, is that learners are more willing to embrace autonomy and responsibility.

Democracy describes multiple support mechanisms. They include relationship building activities in the class as a whole, in small groups, and in "buddy pairs". There are other early activities which help learners prepare for the course, including a "standard package" which is then renegotiated. I found that for learners it was less stressful to renegotiate a described course structure than it was to design a course *de novo*.

The use of a standard package illustrates ways in which small changes can add to the robustness of a learning process. As the paper describes, in my early classroom facilitation I tried to involve learners from the beginning in course design. For many this was very threatening. Eventually I learned both to build support and relationships first, and also to use a standard package as a starting

point for negotiation. The standard package reduced anxiety in two ways. It provided:

- a starting point for negotiation
- a package which any class member could revert to, thus comprising a safety net that allowed participants to take riskier decisions about course design and about their participation.

The "safety net" element provides some protection against the standard package being taken as a fait accompli. My own willingness to be genuinely open to class suggestions further helped.

As a further advantage of a standard package, the insights of each cohort could be built into it each year. Many improvements were thus carried forward to the next cohort instead of being lost.

Processes for reflection are described in each of the papers I've just referred to. In a conference paper "Reflection for everyone" (paper 08), henceforth *Reflection*, it is a central emphasis.

Paper 08 — Reflection for everyone

Adelle Bish and Bob Dick (1992) Reflection for everyone: catering for individual differences. *Reflective practices in higher education conference Collection of papers*, Brisbane, pp.133-153.

This conference paper was presented at the Reflective Practice in Higher Education Mini Conference, Brisbane 11-13 July 1992. It identifies a large number of "reflective mechanisms" used to enhance learning and theory-practice integration.

In her research Adelle found that there were many processes built into the course to aid reflection. In addition, other processes were also reported to be an aid to reflection and therefore learning. Different people favoured different mechanisms. Many people found the combination of mechanisms better than any single one.

The existence of both individual and collective mechanisms for reflection both enhanced reflection and catered for individual differences.

Reflection discusses the mechanisms for reflection which are an important part of my classroom practice. The mechanisms were identified by an evaluation of the social consultancy course (Bish, 1992) which Adelle carried out for a postgraduate dissertation under my supervision.

Some of the reflective mechanisms had been built into the course by design. Adelle and I identified ten of them. Another ten which were there for other purposes were reported by participants to aid reflection and learning.

At our conference session many participants were surprised at the number of practices which the course contained. Some said that until then they had thought of a single practice as adequate.

Adelle's research also showed that individual differences between learners were important. The variety meant that learners could make use of those practices which worked best for them. It appears that *robust* processes are not always *simple* processes, though clearly there are advantages if they can be.

The design of learning processes

In a later section in this chapter I include documents which are brief examples of learning processes. In this section I first refer to two other documents. One of them is an unpublished monograph, *Design for learning* (paper 09), henceforth *Design*. It has been used as a course handout for some years by myself and others at Griffith University. The topic it addresses, as you might expect, is the design of learning processes. The other is the monograph *Managing transitions*.

Paper 09 — Design for learning

Bob Dick (2001) *Design for learning: processes and models for the design of learning activities*, version 5. Chapel Hill: Interchange.

This lengthy paper offers detailed processes which can be used to design experiential learning activities. The experiential learning cycles of Kolb (1984) and Goodstein and Pfeiffer (1988) form one basis for the design approach. Links between processes for learning, change and problem-solving are pointed out. The "FIDO" model (feelings, information, decisions, outcomes) is also introduced.

The monograph uses multiple models and numerous illustrative anecdotes to help readers understand the processes and relate them to their own experiences.

Using experiential learning as the main emphasis the monograph provides descriptions of learning processes. In anticipation of later themes in this thesis, it relates learning processes to process for change and for action research. In doing so, and in extending David Kolb's learning cycle, it increases the flexibility of experiential learning processes as usually described.

There are two features of the monograph that I would particularly like to draw attention to. First, notice that choice is built into the learning cycle to increase its flexibility. Second, the "FIDO" model captures in a single diagram a substantial amount of relevant information. That information is "tiered". At its simplest the model provides the mnemonic "Fido". Further information is then attached to each of these four elements (feelings, information, decisions, outcomes) to extend the model.

Figure 4.1 (Figure 9 from that paper) summarises some of the elaborations of the learning cycle. The possibility of input into each segment is allowed for. So is the sharing of information ("publishing") after each segment.

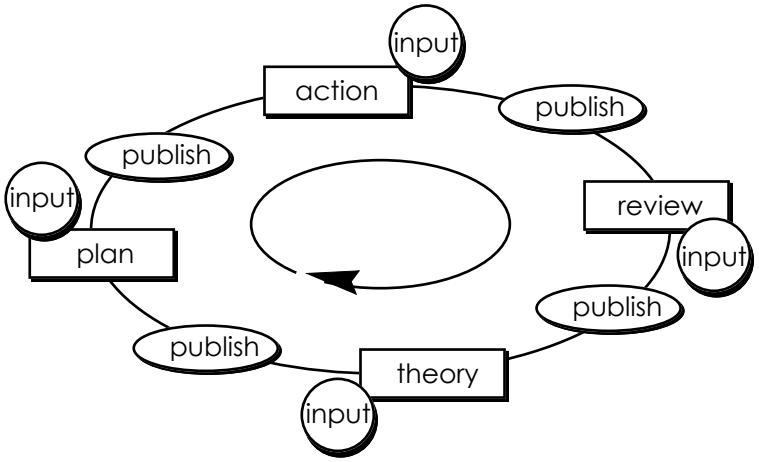

Fig. 4.1 An extension of the learning cycle.
(From *Mechanisms for democracy in learning*)

Agreeing with Kolb, I emphasise that the cycle can begin at any element. Going further I recommend thatthe cycle is closed by returning to the first element, whichever it is, as a fifth element: for example plan → act → review → theorise → plan. These extensions of the learning cycle increase the variety of the learning designs that it can be used to develop.

Managing transitions (henceforth *Transitions*) is a monograph which also addresses the design and facilitation of learning processes, though from a different perspective. It was written in collaboration with Tim Dalmau. [2]

Monograph — Managing transitions

Tim Dalmau and Bob Dick (1992) *Managing transitions: a key to creating effective learning environments*. Chapel Hill, Qld.: Interchange.

2. After an initial planning meeting Tim wrote much of the first draft of the material on beginnings and endings. I wrote much of the earlier drafts on transitions within a process. We then revised each other's contributions until we were both happy with the outcome. There is also related material in *Helping groups to be effective*, also in the final volume of the thesis.

This monograph describes how workshop design and facilitation can be enhanced by attending to beginnings and endings, and transitions between workshop segments.

Beginnings and endings are described as transitions from and to the world outside the learning experience. The "joins" between workshop segments are identified as places where workshop designs often break down. They therefore repay attention during design and facilitation.

The monograph reiterates the importance of beginnings, discussed in some of the papers considered elsewhere in this explication. Such preparatory activities serve a preventive function. They eliminate many difficulties before they arise. In addition, in the monograph we examine the role of endings in helping to transfer training from workshop to the work and life of participants. I think many of our suggestions are vindicated by research (such as that reported by Holton and Baldwin, 2003) which finds that learning transfer from workshop or classroom to the "real world" is difficult.

A point we make in the monograph is that many facilitators think of workshops as sequences of activities. We offer a complementary alternative. It is also possible to pay attention to the *transitions* — the joins between segments, or between the workshop and its environment.

(I will later use this as an example of a "strategic concept". That is, a concept which can expand the way people think about something.)

So far in this chapter my emphasis has been on the design of processes, and some of the large-scale processes which characterise my classroom work. As I have mentioned, to describe process in writing is to do it something of an injustice. I can hint at the *process* of facilitating learning by now including examples of training materials which attempt to apply the design principles.

Examples of activities

The first example (paper 10) is a description of a workshop which introduces learners to the learning cycle. It is experiential in the sense that it asks learners to imagine an actual situation, to make a choice, and to draw conclusions from their choice and the choices that others make.

Paper 10 — Experiential learning

Bob Dick (2002) The design of experiential learning activities. Unpublished paper (mimeo).

This handout on experiential learning, itself designed as a miniature experiential learning activity, draws on the Kolb cycle at both content and process levels. At the content level it shows how questionnaires and similar instruments can engage people in what amounts to a mental simulation of activity. At the process level it follows the Kolb cycle (as far as a written document can do so) in the steps that it follows.

Such a written presentation is weaker as experiential learning than an actual activity. However, presented as a "thought experiment" it can be an economical way of approaching the Kolb cycle. Participants can deduce the Kolb cycle as a model from their experience. Facilitators can assist through skilful questioning.

In practice I often use this handout as part of a workshop on experiential learning. In the first part of the workshop, learners experiment with different ways of accepting compliments. From this they deduce the principles of accepting compliments. In the second part of the workshop they then reflect on the workshop they have just taken part in. From this they deduce the principles of experiential learning.

The second activity (paper 11) is quite a brief extract from a 308-page workbook to help people practice communication skills, *Learning to communicate*. In a class of about 130 people, self managed class groups of six people used the workbook to work through activities for integrated skill and concept development. I include it to illustrate the style of the workbook. You will note that it allows self-management by the participants while capturing an experiential approach on paper.

Paper 11 — Self and others

Bob Dick (1986) Self and others. An extract from Bob Dick, *Learning to communicate: activities, skills, techniques, models*. A joint publication of Interchange and the University of Queensland Bookshop.

The extract includes examples of activies done within the class and "homework" in the form of assignments and worksheets. The activities are experiential, with some conceptual support. They progress from individual activities on self-awareness to an activity on awareness of others. The section concludes with an exercise on depth of disclosure.

Later parts of the workbook, not shown here, build upon this foundation to help participants develop effective communication skills. These skills are then applied to such activities as facilitation and conflict resolution.

The workbook from which this was taken was designed primarily for use within self-managed groups of six people. They worked their way through graded activities to develop communication skills and relevant supporting understanding.

In writing such workbooks I try to reproduce in writing the instructions I would give if I were facilitating the process within a workshop. It could be said that to some extent the process description is acting as if it were facilitator. Of course it

lacks the flexibility and responsiveness that an experienced facilitator could bring to the activity.

I invite you to notice several features:

- the combination of action and concepts
- the inclusion of exercises outside the class to increase transfer to the outside world
- the progression from individual skills to interpersonal skills.

The third document in this section is not really an activity, though it is intended to be vicariously experiential. It is a video script, "Tightrope" (paper 12).

Paper 12 — Tightrope

Bob Dick (1987) *Tightrope: a video script on telephone communication skills*. Chapel Hill, Qld.: Interchange.

This video script was commissioned bythe Department of Community Services, who then used it as the basis for a training video. It illustrates communication skills through conversations between three characters and customers on a telephone. The skills are both displayed and explained.

The script was written to support communication skills training for front line staff in the Queensland Department of Community Services (DCS). It was intended for use as part of a workshop in which skills were learned and practised. The video provides appropriate role models who act out the skills, and explanations which provide a rationale for the skills. I include it here as an example of how the written word, translated into a film, can assist skill development in a way that integrates theory and practice. It illustrates my interest in providing vicarious experience to learners.

Such a script depends to some extent on the assumption that, in watching a video, participants may internalise the experience of the characters on the screen. There is research that expert practitioners on film can be effective models for novices. Barbara Rosenstein (2002) has reviewed some of the evidence. It seemed to me that the effectiveness of a video would be enhanced by relevance and realism. Prior to writing the script I therefore spent some time observing work in a DCS office and talking with some of the people who worked there. I also examined some of the training documentation which would also be used in any communication skills training.

The characters were chosen to be most relevant to the departmental officers who did much of the difficult front-line work on the telephone. They were often young women supervised by older men. They were often thrown into the job with relatively little experience. As you might imagine, stress and attrition rates were high. That was the catalyst for commissioning the video script.

In re-reading the videoscript I notice I made use of a device I would now call "dialectic". The young people in the front line were often torn between their concern for their clients and the requirement to meet departmental procedures. In the script the characters achieve both of these and demonstrate how it can be done.

I'll use Scott Kelso's device (Kelso, 2005) to indicate such a resolution of apparent contradictions or polarities. He symbolises the polarities with a tilde "~" joining the two terms. By this he intends to indicate that they are capable of being integrated; it isn't necessary to choose one or the other. This polarity might be termed "caring~responsible".

The fourth document contains a design for a simulation where the content is developed entirely by the participants, as is much of the process.

Paper 13 — Powerplay, a simulation

Bob Dick (1991) *Powerplay: a "do-it-yourself" simulation*. Unpublished mimeo.

This workshop design was initially written for the Second International Conference on Experiential Learning (Hawkesbury Agricultural College, 3-7 July, 1989). I facilitated the simulation and used this document as a handout. The process was subsequently also used elsewhere and revised.

Participants first choose a topic and then design the simulation. Following this, they play the simulation they have designed. Finally they debrief the simulation and identify any insights which they have gained from it.

The *content* of the simulation consists of what the participants do and say when they play the simulation. The *process* is what they design. Powerplay offers them a process for designing the process. I describe such a process as "metaprocess" (mentioned again later).

You will notice that such an approach places few constraints on what design is developed, and even fewer on what people do and say during the simulation. The metaprocess provides a framework within which participants may feel more confident to create (and then act out) the process and content.

You will notice also that the information is once again tiered. There is a brief overview followed by a more detailed step-by-step description of the metaprocess.

Other papers

The four documents in the preceding section deal with the fine grain of facilitation. They describe processes which occupy minutes or hours of time.

The final documents considered in this chapter address the wider context of educational philosophy and course design.

The first of them is a paper which critiques the philosophical model which has guided most psychological training in the USA, UK and Australia. The "scientist-practitioner model", as it is known, has been the philosophical core of such training since it was adopted at the Boulder conference (Raimy, 1950).

Paper 14 — The scientist-practitioner model

Bob Dick (1996) Is it time to revise the scientist-practitioner model? An unpublished discussion paper. Revised in 1996 from an earlier draft.

There is evidence that practitioner training based on the scientist-practitioner model does not achieve its objectives of developing research-oriented practitioners. There are also reasons to believe that theory does not always precede practice, contrary to what the model (as usually implemented) assumes. An important aspect of the scientist-practitioner model is a scientific attitude: collecting and analysing available evidence and being logically consistent.

The paper attempts to apply these two values to critique the scientist-practitioner model as usually implemented. It presents the relevant evidence from the literature and examines the assumption about the relationship between theory and practice.

My own university classes have always received good ratings for both relevance and enjoyment from participants. They also rated well in independent evaluations. For instance, for her honours thesis Deborah Johnston (1984) surveyed graduates who had completed their honours year one, three or five years previously. Those graduates who had taken my classes found them more relevant to their practice as psychologists than were other classes they had taken. I had assumed that such evidence would persuade some of my colleagues to change their own classroom work in the same direction.

I was mistaken. Some dismissed my work as "not really psychology". Others charged me with abandoning my "duty", which was to convey the accumulated knowledge of psychology to the next generation of psychologists.

I thought that, by presenting a point of view in a way which exhibited their own espoused values I might encourage some of my colleagues to reconsider. Again I was mistaken. I have learned from this and similar experiences. See Change tool 17, "Beliefs without reason", in paper 17, Community and organisational change.

However, I have other reasons for including the paper here. It is as an example of the influence of the larger context within which processes operate. What can happen within a class to some extent depends on the wider system of which it is part. If I were rewriting it now I would soften the challenge and give more attention to ideas which would help readers reframe their own experience.

Paper 15 originally served a similar purpose. In it I chose a less direct way of addressing the issues and used ideas to help readers in reframing their beliefs.

Paper 15 — Teaching psychology

Bob Dick (1995) *A Venusian anthropologist's report on the teaching of psychology*, with the preface "On being a Venusian anthropologist." Nathan, Qld: Griffith University, School of Behavioural Science. First written in 1990 while on secondment to Griffith University to assist with course development.

A somewhat tongue-in-cheek discussion paper, though with a serious aim. It consists of three parts. The first introduces the notion of court jester as a valuable role which allows important but threatening information to be given. The second describes a classroom strategy intended to encourage learners to put aside their preconceptions. The third then offers an analysis different to what most readers will be familiar with.

I think it is informative to examine the purpose which each section of the paper is intended to serve:

- *The "court jester" story.* This suggests that it can be useful if unpopular information can be voiced, and that it can be valuable to appoint somebody to do so.

  My intention was to increase the likelihood that people would read what I had to say. In other words, the purpose could be described as that of *legitimising* the expression of a view contrary to that held by some readers.

- *The "venusian anthropologist" learning device*. I have reproduced (in the box, below) some paragraphs from the paper which describe the instructions used in a classroom form of the device. As the paper explains, it is intended to influence the expectations which learners otherwise bring to the university classroom.

The "Venusian anthropologist" learning device in the classroom

I'm speaking to you, individually. Just forget for the moment that there are others in the class, and think of this as a conversation the others can't hear.

You are a trainee Venusian anthropologist. You have just been beamed down to Earth as part of your first field project, and you find yourself suddenly seated here in amongst all these earthlings. Obviously you can't announce yourself as a Venusian anthropologist — it might create an interplanetary incident.

You have been told nothing about Earth. This project is to give you practice in observing and understanding an interplanetary culture without any prior information or exposure. Your task is to understand Earth culture and behaviour, and write an assignment on it when you return safely to Venus.

As a trainee Venusian anthropologist, what do you make of the behaviour you experience around you right now? What will you have to say about Earth behaviour? This is your first sample of Earth behaviour, and you have no way of knowing how typical it is. But you have to start somewhere. What notes will you take on this sample of Earth.

Although less powerful in its written form, the device addresses expectations and again serves the purpose of legitimisation. On this occasion it is intended to suggest to the reader that it may be useful to suspend their expectations.

- *The "Venusian" report*. Here the paper offers a different perspective on the nature of universities, and psychology, and learning. It offers the more contentious views tentatively. ("*But perhaps we are mistaken here*.") There are regular reminders that the supposed author is not a native. ("*Yes, Venusian do have minds*.") It does attempt to offer a feasible design which observes the necessary constraints.

Taken together, the three parts are intended to encourage the reader to suspend judgment so that the design can be judged on its merits. As an example of process it raises the issues of legitimisation and dealing with expectations.

The final document (paper 16) in this chapter is a formal proposal for the design of a postgraduate coursework program in organisational psychology.

Paper 16 — Course design

Bob Dick, Alf Lizzio and Keithia Wilson (1995) *Course design: a Masters/PhD program in organisational psychology*. Nathan: Griffith University, School of applied psychology. A discussion paper.

This document was an input into a course planning activity at Griffith University. It was one of a number of proposals considered by the planning committee designing a new postgraduate program.

The proposed design is characterised by a learner-centred and outcome-centred approach in which theory-practice integration features prominently. External constraints are also noted and observed, and the existence of external stakeholders taken into account.

The paper was written up by me after a planning session between the three authors.

Not all the features proposed in this paper survived the planning process. However, the final program as it existed when I left Griffith University (December 2002) did provide learners with a balance between autonomy and accountability. For the most part it achieved the intention of "an overall conception ... of a course which uses structure, processes and staff and other resources to create a learning community of practitioner-scholars" [p 1]. The aims of being learner-centred, practice-oriented and achieving theory-practice integration largely survived intact from the planning process.

For the purposes of the topic of this explication, certain features can be noted:

- the wider environment is taken into account
- imposed constraints are observed
- the presence of external stakeholders is noted, and their views are sought.

The key design aims of the course were achieved.

Effective processes for learning

Taken together, these documents illustrate certain aspects of processes which contribute to learning. I'll consider them separately under the headings of context, legitimacy and engagement, transparency, and monitoring, though they interact. I'll then examine which of these contribute to robustness of a learning process and of processes generally.

Context

The context in which the courses were embedded was influential. The courses were graded, which would not have been my choice. University finances determined if a second staff member could be involved. Timetabling had to fit in with other classes. There were approval and audit processes within the university and beyond which had to be observed. And more.

However, the courses demonstrate that much could be achieved despite the constraints. Several reasons come to mind.

- In retrospect, we sought to make assets of our liabilities. For example, we took Australian Psychological Society attitudes towards psychology into account by building their competency list into our postgraduate coursework. (See also Gloria Townsend's 1998 account of her treatment of liabilities in a computer course.)
- In some instances, the initial design ignored the contraints so that we would not be unnecessarily encumbered by them. For example, we had no hesitation in conducting some classes off campus.
- At the same time, we tried to be clear about those constraints which were unavoidable and to do the best we could within them. For example, although the courses were required to be graded we implemented several practices which still favoured learning over grading. One such innovation was to provide copious and helpful feedback without a grade for any assignments submitted at least two weeks before the negotiated due date. (As a bonus we found that people paid more attention to feedback when they were able to act on it in a revision of their assignments.)

Where there are constraints I have found a conceptual model developed from Stanley Coopersmith's 1967 study of self-esteem useful. In his report of his study of the development of self-esteem Coopersmith says [1967: 236]:

> *"The most general statement about the antecedents of self-esteem can be given in terms of three conditions: total or nearly total acceptance of the children by*

their parents, clearly defined and enforced limits, and the respect and latitude for individual action that exist within the defined limits."

I use Coopersmith's concepts in the form of a six item checklist to aid in course design. (See the box below.)

A checklist for manager/team relationships
(derived from Coopersmith, 1967)

- Freedom ...
- within limits ...
- that are clear ...
- and negotiable.
- High aspirations and ...
- unconditional support.

That looks somewhat different to the quote from Coopersmith immediately above. It recasts Coopersmith's conclusions as three dialectics: freedom~limits; clarity~negotiability; challenge~support. I believe my version is consistent with the book as a whole.

It has also proved to be a useful model for considering other relationships in addition to parent-child relationships: between facilitator and group, for instance, or between lecturer and class, or manager and team. When all six conditions in the checklist are met, it seems to be easier to achieve high involvement and good outcomes. In its form as a six-item checklist I've found it more usable in practice than Coopersmith's description.

Legitimacy and engagement

A major theme in the early papers in this chapter is that of "arousal without anxiety". As I mentioned, this was achieved by balancing challenge with

support — the final two criteria in those developed from Stanley Coopersmith's (1967) work. Several aspects of the courses contributed:

- preparatory work in the early sessions in the class
- negotiating content so that material is relevant
- involving learners in decisions throughout the courses
- offering a "standard package" as a starting point
- matching the challenge to the people.

I deal with these in turn. As the whole-year honours class in social consultancy included all of these, I will use it as the example in most of what follows. However, I could have used other courses, or similar work done outside university.

Preparatory work

Early sessions were used to create an appropriate climate for productive work. In the terms that Dick Axelrod (2003) uses in organisational settings, the key purpose is to achieve a sense of real engagement. As Ira Shor (1996) notes for educational settings, genuine democracy is an important part of this.

Relationship building and establishing a sense of community are important components. Content, process and roles are negotiated, which has the effect of establishing appropriate expectations — for the learners and for me. Because assessment is a source of anxiety at university, negotiating assessment is given attention.

As I discuss in *Helping groups to be effective* and some other documents the preparation has three components:

- getting to know each other
- agreeing on individual and collective goals, and

- developing guidelines for how we plan to work together.

I have recently come across the field of *cultural-historical activity theory* (for instance, Gordon Wells, 1999). It has provided me with a useful way of thinking about appropriate challenge. It draws on two earlier concepts: Jerome Bruner's (1967) *scaffolding* and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) *zone of proximal development*. The notion is that learners are capable of exceeding their usual achievements. A challenge is presented which is just beyond their present competence. To assist them to take the extra step, peers or educator provide support that lifts their confidence, or other assistance is given.

In the classes I've described here the learners were encouraged to set their own goals within a supportive environment. I believe it also helped that a non-judgmental climate was created. In addition the course processes were transparent. Learners knew what was being done, and why.

Transparency

Officially my role was that of "lecturer". In fact I delivered few lectures. Those I did give took the form of combined input and activity. My role was nearer to what Edgar Schein (1988, 1999) labels "process facilitation". I acted not as expert, but as a supportive helper who encouraged people to do their own learning. In the early weeks of courses I modelled the processes and skills that learners might later need. I explained the concepts behind the processes and skills. I encouraged learners to question and challenge me. I worked hard to involve learners in making decisions about process as well as content.

To judge from our regular reviews, most learners experienced the courses as "unstructured". Even a cursory examination of papers 05 to 09 reveals a complex and elaborate structure indeed. However, I think it is relevant that the structure is at what might be called a *metaprocess* level. The processes and structures engage learners in choosing and managing processes. This, too, is

what Schein does. His approach to consultancy might as well be called metaprocess consultation.

It is also worthy of note, I think, that metaprocess and process and content acted in parallel. The content and process of the course were about consultancy. I drew on the same content and process in my metaprocess facilitation.

Perhaps I should mention a possible confusion in calling the courses experiential. They don't consist only of experiences. Rather, they use the principles of experiential learning, combining theory and activity. The learning cycle of David Kolb (1984) was an explicit process used. "Making the process visible" was adopted almost as a motto. This is most evident in some of the workbooks included in later volumes of the thesis. In effect, a workbook can provide the facilitation.

Monitoring

You will recall that Adelle Bish's (1992) evaluation (see paper 08) identified many mechanisms for reflection that were designed for other purposes. Many of the reflective mechanisms also served for course review. As course content was mirrored in processes and metaprocesses, any review of any of these helped the learning of all three.

The review and reflection processes served multiple purposes and operated over several time scales. The purposes included making the processes visible, acting as a vehicle for learning, and continuing to improve the course. These functions apply also for each of the different time scales:

- Learners were encouraged to question or challenge the course process or content at any time, moment by moment, and to suggest improvements.

- Typically, each activity within a class was reviewed. So was each piece of assessment done by class members — people attached their own evaluation and learning statement to everything that they did.
- Time was spent in small groups and then pairs at the end of each class, to recall and review what had happened. The same pairs met at the beginning of the following week to remind each other of their conversation. As a whole class, if required, we then revisited the content and renegotiated the process before proceeding.
- Time was set aside at regular intervals during the year for more extensive reviews.
- The final class of the year reviewed the year as a whole. Class members prepared two sets of suggestions: to me, and to the next cohort. I used the suggestions to me to amend the standard package. The suggestions to the next cohort were conveyed to them at the start of the next year.

I will later deal in more detail with the concept illustrated here of cycles within cycles. In this instance there are five levels of nested cycles.

Classroom as process laboratory

The paucity of my documents on education and training might suggest that my classroom practice is not important to the processes described in later chapters. This would be a false impression. The contribution to my thinking on process is important. It was in the classroom that many of the processes I use elsewhere began to take shape. In my classroom work I developed a strong desire for processes usable by the people, mostly novices, in my classes. This need provided the motivation for understanding, designing and describing robust processes. Much of my writing began as classroom handouts.

In off-campus training work I deliberately use processes developed in on-campus work. The university classes therefore provided a laboratory in which learning processes could be continuously refined.

Further, my classroom work provided almost 30 years of continuous evolution of learning designs. Such an evolution is not as easily achievable in consulting and training work.

It is now time to gather together the implications of the material in these papers for the design and facilitation of learning processes and how they can be made robust.

Contributions to robustness

As I've said elsewhere in this explication, my intention was to utilise processes in the classroom that were robust enough to be usable by novices. The description of the classes in Paper 05, *Mechanisms*, summarises the features which had evolved by 1987. The features identified in that paper therefore provide a summary of elements which contributed to that robustness.

Those features included:

- the self-improving nature of the courses, especially through the nested cycles of review and action;
- the importance of informed self-selection into the courses;
- the careful definition and negotiation of responsibility;
- the contributions of course methods, including metaprocesses, to course effectiveness;
- the use of a "standard assessment package" as a safety net, to which people could return when their negotiated assessment did not work out;
- the centrality of assessment as a source of concern, and the need therefore to take it heavily into account in course design;

- the use of marking criteria and recycling as ways of specifying more clearly the non-negotiable standards, and providing focussed feedback on the attainment of those standards;
- the two-tier marking system, which removes much of the risk and competition from what might otherwise be risky or chancy aspects of assessment;
- the importance of the overall climate which develops, particularly when comradeship and involvement provide a reward for effort. Hence, the value of goal-setting and team building in the early stages. I had underestimated the importance of this in the past. (*Mechanisms*: pp 78-79)

Some of these contributed directly to robustness. Others helped to build the democractic climate and high involvement which indirectly helped class effectiveness.

Between 1987 and the end of my university appointment in 2002 the courses continued to evolve. Appendix 1 [3] displays a class handout which describes some of the more recent features of the class.

Even where the details have changed, most of the principles remain. I would now give extra emphasise to the self-improving process, the negotiation of responsibility, the attention to process and especially metaprocess, and the class climate. Drawing on the other papers in the chapter, and on my more recent experience, I would also add: [4]

- the value of reexamining conventional beliefs
- the benefit of considering *transitions* as well as segments in design and facilitation
- related to this, the importance of transitions to and from the learning activity or program; this is especially true of beginnings, I think

3. Appendices are included at the end of this explication.
4. There are hints of many of these in the earlier documents.

- the importance of encouraging reflection if the learning is to be more than tacit
- the differences from person to person and class to class so that no one design fits all
- the importance of the finer grain of moment-by-moment process design and facilitation and monitoring
- the virtue of taking the wider context into account.

I now give even greater emphasis to the balance of challenge and support (mentioned in the papers under the heading of "Arousal without anxiety").

There is some overlap between the issues identified above and those addressed in the next chapter, on processes for change.