CHAPTER 10

THE EVOLVING PERSONS

IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

10.1. Introduction

In his work on the history of science, Thomas Kuhn[252] showed how building up a descriptive vocabulary is as much a part of the development of science as testing hypotheses. The Six Dimensions/Five Transformations model is my effort to develop a coherent, action-facilitating, growth-supporting way of describing what is going on inside of and in between people. Beyond what is normally thought of as the scope of science is the reflexive process of human self-creation. Our descriptive vocabularies about ourselves are a significant aspect of who we are. A rock will not become a tree if we call it a tree. But people have a tendency to grow into whatever their descriptive vocabularies emphasize. This makes the development of descriptive vocabularies a significant task, and especially so when the vocabularies are the background of teaching, as is the case in my situation.

Up to this point in this study I have focused primarily on describing conversations and have made only passing mention of the all-important contexts in which conversations take place. Following Pearce, et. al., I see moment-to-moment communication taking place inside a nested hierarchy of contexts. To illustrate this point I reproduced in chapter 5 a diagram from Pearce's paper, which I repeat below for your convenience (with my amendments in italics).

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[252]Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 45.

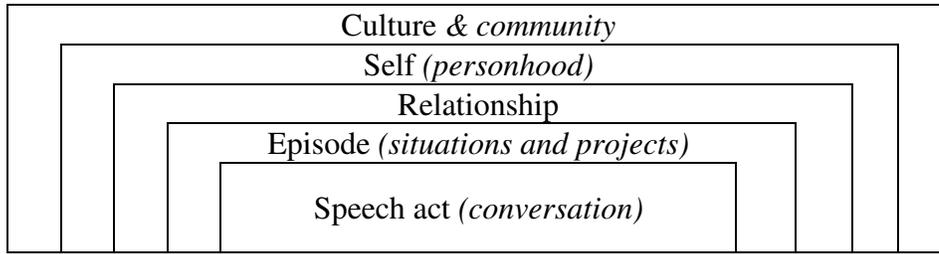| Culture *& community* |
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| Self *(personhood)* |
| Relationship |
| Episode *(situations and projects)* |
| Speech act *(conversation)* |

Figure 10.1. The hierarchy of contexts in interpersonal communication.[253]

In my flow-chart illustrations of the Six Dimensions model I tried to indicate these contexts by drawing multiple layers joined together by a dynamic loop, as shown in the drawing fragment below.
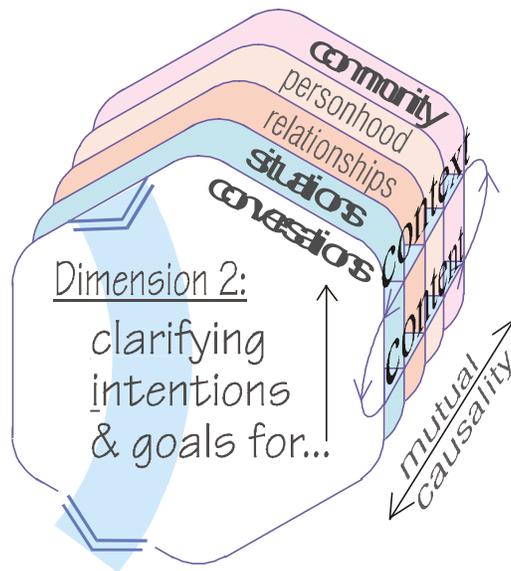

Figure 10.2. A fragment of the Six Dimensions CONTEXTS flow chart.

In this multiple-layered arrangement, which is repeated throughout the Six Dimensions model, I am trying to convey a host of nested interactions: that situations and projects provide the context for conversations and conversations provide the content of situations and projects; that relationships provide the context for situations and projects, and situations and projects provide the content of relationships, and so on. It is not within

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[253]W. Barnett Pearce, Vernon E. Cronen and R. Forrest Conklin. "On What to Look At When Studying Communication: A Hierarchical Model of Actors' Meanings," *Communication* 4 (1979): 195-220, cited in Pearce, *Interpersonal Communication*, 347.

the scope of this study to document all the ways that content and context interact, or to explore the assertion implied in my drawings that similar dynamics appear to occur at various different scales of human cooperation.

However, I would like to present a brief overview of the relationship between the conversation and personhood layers, as a way of justifying my assertions that the Six Dimensions/Five Transformations model, and most other forms of communication training as well, are models of both interpersonal communication and human development; In giving this overview of human development I will make reference to communication training in general rather that only the Six Dimensions model, in order to highlight the way I see all types of communication training as also forms of developmental coaching.

10.2. The tasks of becoming a person

In earlier chapters of this study I have made reference at various points to my experience that coaching people in the development of new communication skills involves an encounter with all the processes that are at work in the unfolding of that particular person's personality or sense of self. This leads naturally to the question of what is going on as someone "becomes a person," which I prefer to express in a more active way as "what are the central tasks of becoming a person?" If Fritjof Capra[254] and other systems theorists are correct in asserting that there really are no separate 'parts' in natural systems, it means to me that good communication training will necessarily have many aspects of developmental coaching.

"What are the central tasks of personhood?" is an enormous question. Fortunately, various thinkers have given it an enormous amount of thought. Unfortunately, it is difficult to be certain about these global assessments concerning personhood because there are many contending ideas in the field. Various scholars emphasize different tasks, and even entirely different frames of reference (biological drives, gender, family histories, genetic predispositions, and so on). Like language, personhood seems to be an essential part of being human, but also a quite variable part. (Perhaps this is because language and personhood are deeply intertwined. That is an idea I will explore as this chapter unfolds.)

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[254]Capra, *The Web of Life*, 37.

In keeping with my preference for active agency, in choosing scholars to rely on I have selected theorists who see people as actively constructing their personhood, rather than simply expressing genetic, cultural or familial influences. My search for an active vocabulary of development that blends well with communication training has prompted me to pass over the work of Erik Erikson[255] in favor of other theorists. It is not clear to me that there is any one best view of human development, and it is very difficult to evaluate the competing truth claims of various developmental theories. What is clear to me is that Erikson's view is largely a third-person view of how people develop. And as I have argued in the earlier chapters of this study, to engage people in direct self-development activities appears to me to require more of a first-person view. (Although I am a great admirer of Carl Jung, I have similar concerns about the difficulty of translating Jung's ideas about human development into action.) In this chapter I will present a brief summary of what I consider to be the most inspiring and energizing answers about the tasks of personhood in Western cultures, understood as the five polarities shown below. And I will attempt to show how each of these developmental tasks is worked on in our conversations with one another and with ourselves.
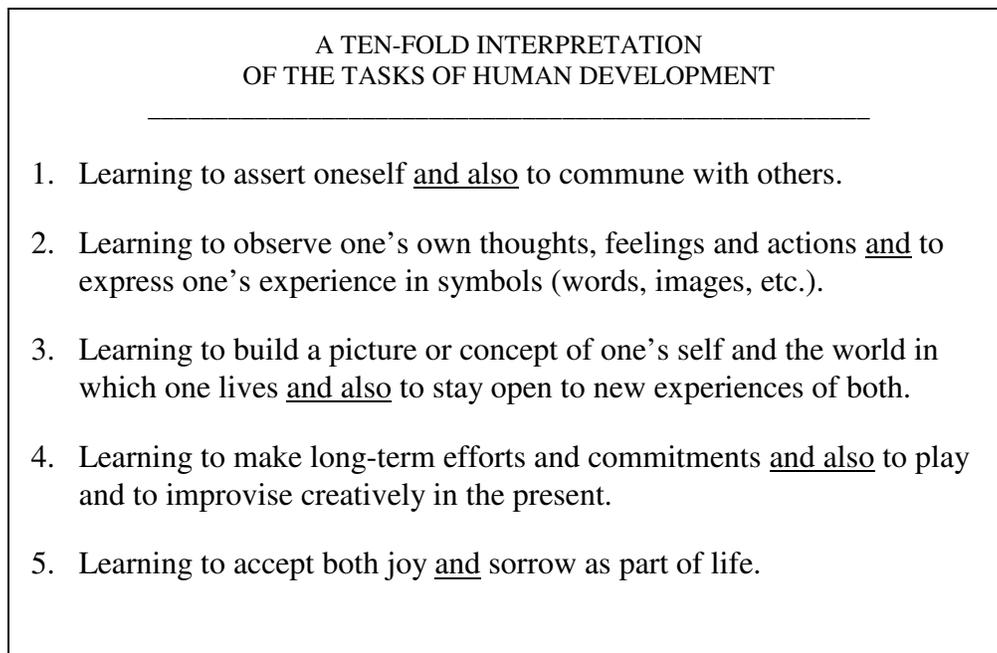

A TEN-FOLD INTERPRETATION
OF THE TASKS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
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1. Learning to assert oneself _and also_ to commune with others.

2. Learning to observe one's own thoughts, feelings and actions _and_ to express one's experience in symbols (words, images, etc.).

3. Learning to build a picture or concept of one's self and the world in which one lives _and also_ to stay open to new experiences of both.

4. Learning to make long-term efforts and commitments _and also_ to play and to improvise creatively in the present.

5. Learning to accept both joy _and_ sorrow as part of life.

Figure 10.3. A ten-fold interpretation of the tasks of human development

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[255]Erik Erikson, _Childhood and Society,_ 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1963).

10.3. Pairs of complements

In trying to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable opposites of electrons behaving like particles under some circumstances and like waves under others, the Danish physicist and philosopher Niels Bohr suggested that, while the opposite of an ordinary truth is a falsehood, the opposite of a great truth is often another great truth. This complementarity, which Bohr later recognized was at the heart of Chinese philosophy,[256] appears to me to be at work in our unfolding as persons (although I am not drawing on Chinese philosophy to support my proposals). In my reading of the literature on human development, the challenges of becoming a person appear to come in complementary pairs. In the pages that follow I will describe each pair. In keeping with the idea of natural systems, I present each of these pairs as interacting with all the others.

10.4. Learning to assert oneself <u>and also</u> to commune with others.

Both Robert Kegan and the Object Relationists agree that an essential part of human development concerns balancing and integrating the drive to assert one's autonomy, integrity and uniqueness of experience, on the one hand, with the need for communion, nurturing and connectedness on the other. This pair appears to me to be a current reworking and extension of Freud's emphasis on the capacity for work(assertion) and love(communion) as the two measures of mental health. The deeper side of asserting one's integrity, from a Rogerian perspective, has to do with trusting one's own feelings and gradually developing and internal sense of rightness (rather than relying on the approval of others to guide one's actions).[257]

Both the need to assert oneself and the need to commune with others are expressed, practiced and fulfilled (well or poorly) in and through conversations (one example of the way that communication training is developmental coaching). Rom Harré suggests that we assert our existence as a person among persons by learning to use the

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[256]Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (New York: Bantam, 1977), 145-146.
[257]Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 118-119.

pronouns of our native language, "I," "me," "you," "him/her," etc. What is significant to me is that as we learn these pronouns we start to create mini-stories called "sentences."

The workbook examples I presented in chapter 4 emphasized fully expressing one's experience in complex five-part sentences. These sentences are equally useful as templates for active listening and empathizing with others.[258] I repeat a part of that example below to illustrate how providing a person with a vocabulary of self-expression can facilitate both asserting and communing.

Table 10.1 Five-part empathizing and asserting.

Perceiving	Emoting	Thinking	Wanting	Envisioning
1. When I saw/ heard...	2. I felt...	3. because I... (need, want, interpret, associate, etc.)	4. and now I want/ then I wanted...	5. so that/ in order to...
EMPATHIZING: (After a long disclosure by the speaker.) **...I hear that when you came across that art exhibit of World War II photographs...**	**...you felt really upset...**	**...because it reminded you of the people you loved in your family who died in the war...**	**...and you wish they would have put up a notice or something, warning people how strong the pictures were**	**...so that you could have kind of mentally prepared yourself, or maybe decided not to see them.**
ASSERTING: **When I read William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice*...**	**...I felt totally outraged...**	**...because it seemed to me that Styron was just using the pain of the holocaust victims as a dramatic hook to get us to read his pot-boiler sex novel...**	**...and I want writers to focus on examples of successful resistance to domination and degradation...**	**...so that we can all find the courage to resist all the various dominations and degradations that we face in our lives.**

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[258] I am indebted for this idea to Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, who uses is as the basis of his communication training workshops. The five-part forms of self-expression and empathizing are adapted from his work. (See Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication.*)

10.5. To learn to observe one's own thoughts, feelings and actions <u>and</u> to learn to express one's experience in symbols (words, images, etc.).

This pair is not as strongly oppositional as the others in this chapter, but it does contain an inner experience/outer expression polarity. In relation to the first pair of tasks, it is interesting to note that both empathizing with others and asserting oneself involve <u>symbolic self-expression</u> in language. And both empathizing with others and asserting oneself involve <u>self-awareness</u>; directly in the case of self-assertion and indirectly in the case of empathizing. (We use our own experience as a basis for empathizing. If we are out of touch with our own emotions, for example, we will have a difficult time feeling other people's emotions.)

As I have discussed at length in previous chapters, the developmental theorist Robert Kegan has proposed that an increasing capacity for self-observation is at the core of human development. Beginning as babies, when we gradually bring our bodily sensations and impulses into focus, we progress along a lifetime curriculum of increasing self-awareness. Over a period of decades we become more able to observe our emotions, thoughts, roles and relationships, and networks of relationships. One of Kegan's most interesting ideas is that our sense of self shifts several times in the course of a lifetime because it is focused on the part of ourselves that we are in the process of discovering. To me, the most powerful implication of Kegan's work is that <u>we can't guide what we can't observe</u>, or, stated in more positive language, that getting better at observing one's thoughts, feelings and actions is a fundamental prerequisite for guiding those processes in fulfilling directions.

What I would add to Kegan's point of view (I think he would probably agree) is that our discovery of our own psychological processes is mediated by the richness or poverty of our cultural vocabularies of experience, and by the kinds of exploratory conversations that we are supported to participate in.

Both Scheff and Kegan attribute profound significance to our learning how to be participant-observers, learning how to get engaged enough in living to be moved by life and learning how to stand back just far enough to make sense out of what is happening

and release the emotions that our engagement with life evokes. Since both our participation in all the dramas of life and our observation of our participation are mediated, in my view, by conversation skills and descriptive vocabularies, the distinction between participation and observation may be a bit overdrawn. The participant-observer stance may be the by-product of a rich vocabulary of experience.

For Carl Rogers, it is in the accurate, genuine expression of our experience <u>in symbolic forms</u> (words, images, music, dance, etc.) that we actually discover our experience and ourselves. According to Rogers, the main psychological problem in life is that, in search of approval from others, we start to say (symbolize) whatever we imagine other people want to hear. Our symbolizing thus gets disconnected from our actual "organismic" experiencing, leading us to become estranged from ourselves.[259] The road toward full-humanness is therefore a path of authentic and expressive symbolization, a willingness to say out loud what one has actually been thinking and feeling. This often starts in psychotherapy, where clients learn to consciously articulate (the better to negotiate) the gaps between their own needs and feelings and the needs and feelings of the important people in their lives. I am reminded here of a lyric from a Black Pride song of the 1960s: "Gonna say it out loud! I'm Black and I'm proud!" For Rogers, the "say it out loud" part is essential.

From my point of view, Rogers' ideas about symbolization add a crucial element to Kegan's overall scenario of human unfolding. The naming of our thoughts and feeling helps us to bring them into focus. Thus, what gets classified as psychopathology may actually be a matter of linguistic and cultural impoverishment: the lack of a rich symbol set and the lack of encouragement for self-expression.   From this perspective, communication training is a kind of inadvertent developmental coaching. Communication trainers generally try to get people to pay attention to their thoughts and feelings, <u>in order to help people communicate those thoughts and feelings more successfully to others.</u> I do not know how often it occurs to communication trainers that <u>learning to pay attention to one's own thoughts and feelings is the central task of adult development!</u> Thus, vocabularies of self-expression are also powerful vocabularies of self-discovery.

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[259]Rogers, *On Becoming a Person,* 108.

10.6. Learning to build a picture or concept of yourself and the world in which you live <u>and also</u> to stay open to new experiences of both.

The question of what is important in human development calls to mind the story of the blind men and the elephant. But in this case, it is not that the men are blind, it is that the elephant is so much larger than any one set of eyes can see. So each reports on the parts he can bring into view. While the idea that we have a picture of life and ourselves is as old as philosophy, this was a facet of human experience that went out of focus for American psychology for the half century between the First World War and the 1960s. George Kelly was one of the key renewers of the idea that something important happens in people between the stimulus and the response. In order to survive, Kelly argued from the 1950s onward, we need to exert some control over our environment and anticipate the course of events (predict what is going to happen). We are all scientists, therefore, trying to figure out the regularities in the world around us and trying to understand which actions will reliably bring what results. Kelly's biologically-oriented view of our knowledge gathering "*...emphasizes the creative capacity of the living thing to represent the environment, not merely to respond to it.* Because he[sic] can represent his environment, he can place alternative constructions upon it, and indeed do something about it if it does not suit him. To the living creature, then, the universe is real, but it is not inexorable unless he chooses to construe it that way."[260] (author's italics) Kelly's view expressed the emerging vision of cognitive psychology and the biology of cognition. It is now commonplace to read discussions of the way that people make models of their worlds, and operate in accordance with those models (and not necessarily in accordance with the actual worlds). Bandler and Grinder[261] frame this as the central problem of psychotherapy, that a person's map has drifted away from a close structural resemblance to the territory of living. Carl Rogers[262] sees the development of a more realistic and accepting self-concept as one of the central changes in person-centered psychotherapy. And the central dynamic in Piaget's psychology of human development is the shifting back and forth between <u>assimilation</u> and <u>accommodation</u>. In assimilation, we use our

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[260]Kelly, *A Theory of Personality,* 8.
[261]Bandler and Grinder, *Structure of Magic*, 14.

existing ideas and thought forms (schemas) to make sense out of what we see. There are always some things that we cannot quite make sense out of with our existing ideas, images and stories. If we move successfully along the curriculum of life, these exceptions eventually provoke us to develop a more inclusive idea or story (accommodation), one that gives meaning to the previously unexplained anomalies. Life is a series of plateaus and revolutions. (For both Piaget and Kuhn, it is important to remember that the <u>revolutions depend upon and grow out of the plateaus</u>. The imperfections of our maps and stories stimulate us to create more inclusive, more subtle maps. Kuhn[263] called this "the essential [creative] tension" in science and Kegan would like to persuade us that this is the essential tension in human development as well. This add considerable depth to Kelly's idea of the person-as-scientist.)

To build an accurate map of oneself and one's world appears to be one of the central tasks of becoming a person. Berger and Luckmann[264] explain our need for such maps of self and world by appealing to evolutionary biology. We are the least programmed and the most adaptable of all species. Our adaptablility allows us to live anywhere, but it means that we are born without a ready-made set of responses to any particular environment. Thus we are doomed or fated to have to create a picture of our world, and we construct these models of life <u>with language, through stories and in conversation</u>. As Peter Berger puts it in *The Sacred Canopy*, "The subjective reality of the world hangs on the thin thread of conversation. The reason why most of us are unaware of this precariousness most of the time is grounded in the continuity of our conversation with significant others."[265] The sharing of experiences, which is at the heart of both conversation and psychotherapy, has an underlying dynamic of looking for reliable themes, recurring patterns of intelligibility, in the flow of events and actions. <u>And</u>, looking for ways that the events and actions of our lives <u>could be reconceptualized</u>

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[262]Rogers, *On Becoming a Person,* 167.
[263]Thomas Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).
[264]Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 47.
[265]Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 17.

in the light of a new and more meaningful theme.[266]

The contrasting pull in this pair of developmental imperatives is our need to <u>stay open to new experiences</u>, to not become imprisoned in our maps and models. All modeling is based on leaving many things out of the picture. Thus, our models of both ourselves and of the world represent what was important to us at a given moment in our life journey. But since we change and the world around us changes, even the most carefully constructed model of life is bound to become progressively more and more unrepresentative of our actual situation. (Perhaps that is why people read one novel after another. I think that reading a new story helps us to tell a new story about our lives.)

This imperative to stay open to new experiences is expressed by many twentieth century psychologists and thinkers. And all who discuss it describe it as a struggle. Piaget describe our struggle to revise our schemas in the light of the exceptions that will not go away. Kuhn speaks of paradigm shifts. Rogers sees one of the consequences of successful person-centered therapy is that the client becomes more comfortable with "being a process," with changing from day to day and with not being able to predict what is going to happen next. As Viktor Frankl remarks, "we cannot really live with Baedekers [guide books] in our hands; if we did so we would overlook all chances in life that come only once; we would skirt our destiny..."[267]

Life appears to present us with a complex task: we both need to make sense out of life with ideas, stories and generalizations, and we also need to continually see beyond them and revise them. This "seeing beyond" our concepts and getting/staying in touch with the ever-changing flow of life is a major theme in Zen, Sufism, General Semantics, Gestalt therapy and the philosophical works of Jiddu Krishnamurti. (While all these schools of thought advocate seeing beyond one's fixed ideas, I do not believe that any would agree with my proposal that we need to both have <u>and</u> see beyond our stories and schemas.)

Just as our story-making and model-building unfold in language and conversation,

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[266]This is the central idea of narrative therapy. See Freedman and Combs, *Narrative Therapy*, and Epston and White, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends.* An earlier example of this approach, from the 1950s and 1960s, is to be found in Viktor Frankl's "logotherapy." See Viktor Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bantam, 1967).

[267]Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 48.

our "seeing beyond" unfolds in conversation also. Therapy is about giving voice to what has been left out of one's established life narrative. Zen and Sufi stories, which originally were told in person by spiritual teachers, attempt to jolt us out of our conceptual ruts with surprise and paradox. General Semantics and Gestalt therapy attempt to deconstruct our established generalizations by confronting us with contradictory counter-instances or encouraging us to adopt the perspective of the other. The new narrative therapy uses probing, provocative questions to help clients see their life experiences from new vantage points.

Communication training includes elements of both story-making and story-deconstruction. We formulate our pictures of life and ourselves in conversation and we change and "see beyond" our pictures in other conversations. Thus, to assist a person in developing new styles of conversing is to invite that person to start telling the story of their life experiences in new ways. I gave examples in chapter 9 of some of new vocabularies of description that I offer my students. I invite them to try using a vocabulary of action ("Please shut the door gently.") rather than a vocabulary of quasi-substances ("I want some *respect*!"). I invite them to use a vocabulary of learning ("I am learning to speak in front of groups more confidently.") rather than a vocabulary of illness ("I have a phobia about public speaking.") And so on. The quality of our communication skills has a direct influence on the way we make models of living and on the way we try to stay open to new experience, thus, again, communication training is a kind of developmental coaching. And it unfolds on several levels. To make explicit what has previously been tacit in a person's communication style is to challenge that person to start over, to see their encounters with others through fresh eyes, to consciously choose a way of speaking and listening rather than following previously learned patterns. All of which constitute a meta-story and meta-conversation about openness. We change our conversations through meta-conversations! Communication training seems to me to include both introducing people to new tools, new stories, new forms of conversation, and also about asking people to pay attention and learn to improvise more creatively.

10.7. Learning to make long-term efforts and commitments and also to play and to improvise creatively in the present.

So much of what is important in life unfolds over long periods of time. Growing food involves planning months and years ahead of time, and long periods of effort that bring no immediate gratification. Raising children involves decades of love and attention. Learning significant skills in both traditional and modern societies involves years of effort. Whether one wishes to be a shaman, skilled craftsperson, doctor, basketball player or violinist, ten years of effort is involved. In chapter 5 I included a quote from Gordon W. Allport which is also relevant here: "The possession of long-range goals, regarded a central to one's personal existence, distinguishes the human being from the animal, the adult from the child, and in many cases the healthy personality from the sick."[268] The "love and work" which form the measure of healthy development in Freudian psychology[269] both involve long-term commitments and resilience in the face of frustration and disappointment. (They both involve a capacity to delight in the present moment, also.) We live in the eternal now. How is it that we live in the present and yet manage to act into the future?

I recognize that in asking this question I am entering (yet again) into an area which is deeply "interpretive." In spite of the fact that there is little certainty about this issue, there are certainly some very interesting intuitions, interpretive leaps and hunches. Here are the best that I have been able to put together.

1. We use our experiences of the past to project story lines into the future.

2. We experience the promises of others and we learn to make and fulfill promises.

3. We have small experiences of effort followed by reward that allow us to imagine that a large amount of effort will be followed by a large reward.

4. We experience the pleasure of effort and mastery in learning to walk, run, swim, bike, skate, etc.

5. We experience ourselves as the objects of continued caring, and thus we learn to devote ourselves to the well-being of other people. As Greenspan describes the

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[268]Gordon W. Allport, *Becoming* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 51.

[269]Robert W. Nye, *Three Psychologies* (Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1992), 19.

process, "Whereas initially a child feels joy, warmth and security passively in herself being loved and cared for, she is soon able to extend these feelings to a beloved caregiver and, gradually, to others in her family, then teachers and peers."[270]

6.   We turn working into an art form, that is, we learn to transform merely instrumental actions into ends in themselves, getting satisfaction out of doing well tasks which do not appear to be inherently satisfying or meaningful. This appears to me to be a creative extension into adult life of our early experiences of mastery in learning to walk and talk, etc.

It is interesting to note, in this regard, Viktor Frankl's idea that we can tolerate any "how" as long as we have a "why." By this he means that a great purpose will allow us to tolerate almost any amount of difficulty. This portrays the process as largely cognitive. But there is also a more active side to it. Activities become meaningful partly by virtue of the effort we invest in them. There is no particular external purpose, for example, in getting a little white ball to roll across a lawn and into a little hole in the ground. Or in climbing Mt. Everest. We make these activities meaningful <u>by virtue of</u> the large amounts of effort we put into them, which is a tribute to human inventiveness.

There are elements of conversation in all of this. The young child's experience of being loved appears to be carried as memories of conversations with her/his caregiver, which are repeated in two-sided soliloquies when the child is alone.[271] And Seligman has documented the way our resilience in the face of disappointment depends upon the kind of explanatory conversations we have (primarily with ourselves, although these could be interpersonal conversations as well). What is most significant for me is the way that <u>we bring the future into the present through conversation</u>. Two of the key elements in communication and negotiation training are to get people to clarify what they want and to help people learn to ask for it through new forms of conversation called "assertiveness" or "negotiation." Although that might not seem to have much developmental significance at first glance, I see in these communication teaching routines a continual practice in <u>imagining a future state of satisfaction and expressing that future state of satisfaction in</u>

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[270]Stanley Greenspan with Beryl Lieff Benderly, *The Growth of the Mind* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1997), 119.

[271]Bruner, *Acts of Meaning,* 91.

present conversations. Many of the conversational moves explained by the speech act theorists, such as offering, promising, accepting, committing, etc., serve this function of imaginatively bringing a future into the present.

The complement to our need to make long term commitments is our need to enter more fully into the present moment. In one sense, the present is all we have and if we are not creatively alive in the present, we are not very alive, period.

In *Playing and Reality*,[272] Donald W. Winnicott, one of the principal architects of the "object relations" point of view, traces the origins of human creativity to the rhythms of infant experience. As the baby comes to realize that mommy is a separate person, mommy's times away from the baby become more and more upsetting. The toddler fights back feelings of abandonment by remembering mommy, by acts of active imagination. The toddler gradually becomes capable of investing a favorite blanket or doll with mommy's comforting presence. Winnicott calls these "transitional objects" because they exist in a zone where imagination and reality overlap. All object relationist theorists view the actively remembered mommy as the core (the "internal object") around which the young child elaborates a sense of self (the "relation"). The unfolding of a sense of self is our first creative endeavor, so we are all artists from the moment we begin life. And Winnicott sees ongoing creative and imaginative activity as the leaven of every life. Healthy persons continue all through life to creatively invest people and objects in their world with emotional significance, drawing on their earliest experiences. And we make new creations of art, story, music and craft, the entire function of which is to celebrate our power to make new emotional meaning where before there was none (an empty canvas, a quiet room before the music starts). "Tell me a story!" the young child says, ready to get stirred up and enchanted about people and creatures who never were. Why should anyone get stirred up, a realist might ask, about people and creatures who never were? Because, Winnicott might answer, emotional meaning is not something that we get out of objects, it is something we learn to give to them, with a lifetime of practice. That practice is called "play" and that process of giving is as much a part of nature as the rocks and trees. Without it, human life is flat. As Winnicott put it,

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[272]Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Tavistock/Methuen, 1982).

It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation. Compliance carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth living. In a tantalizing way many individuals have experienced just enough of creative living to recognize that for most of their time they are living uncreatively, as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine.[273] (my italics)

With regard to conversation, in telling one another the stories of our daily experiences we creatively turn life (mostly random events) into art (meaningful narratives). And in listening to one another's stories, we each become the primordial "comforting and accepting other" of early childhood, a "thou" in the context of whose presence it becomes possible to be an "I."

Although we need to plan for the future and make long-term efforts in order to survive and to unfold our abilities, every virtue in life can be overdone. In modern societies the rewards for being future-oriented are so large that many people are tempted to abandon the present altogether, that is to say, to become so obsessed with future-oriented activities that they are too preoccupied to enjoy and cultivate nurturing day-to-day interaction with others. A future orientation can also be a way of actively blotting out one's awareness of troubling feelings and situations. Unfortunately, such bulwarks against one's troubles continually have to be repaired and rebuilt, leading to a life in which there is never a sense of rest.

Just as eating and breathing are present time activities that cannot be put off to some future year, many human virtues, such as awareness, compassion, a sense of beauty and the healthy expression of feeling, unfold entirely in and through the present moment.

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[273]Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 65.

Art, meditation, sports and psychotherapy are important ways in which people who have learned to "delay gratification" struggle to re-enter the moving present moment of their lives. (Although each of these can also be turned into a future-oriented project.) And to that list I would add the open-ended conversations of friendship. Friendship is based on the present experience of liking another person, and, ideally, serves no goals beyond itself.[274] I have grown to believe that friends are people who want to hear the stories of one another's lives, and who like the underlying patterns of meaning-making they find in their friends' story-telling. In encouraging people to express their experience more completely and listen more appreciatively, communication trainers are also coaching their students to become better friends and to enter more fully into the present.

10.8. Learning to accept and express both joy and sorrow.

This is the last and I think the most difficult to explain of my five pairs of proposed developmental imperatives. Of the two feelings, my impression is that sorrow has been better understood than joy, so I will start with it.

The clearest statement I have been able to find concerning the role of sorrow in life is Judith Viorst's *Necessary Losses*,[275] the result of her six years of study at the Washington Psychoanalytic Society. I will introduce her ideas with a preface from my own thoughts about sorrow.

I have a strong feeling that there is at work in everyday life (at least in my world of middle-class America) a deep misconception about suffering and sorrow, which is that since we suffer when we make mistakes, all suffering must be the result of some mistake that we have made. And therefore if we could just perfect our technique of living and stop making mistakes we would not have to suffer. I believe that it is this misconception that causes people to hide their suffering from one another, because to acknowledge one's suffering is implicitly to confess that one has sinned or erred some way or other. An alternative misunderstanding of suffering, one associated with what mental health professionals now call "character disorders," is that all suffering in life is caused by someone else's hostile actions toward us.

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[274]William K. Rawlins, *Friendship Matters* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1992), 18.

As it happens, life is much more complex than that. Although we do make mistakes and cause ourselves to suffer, and although other people occasionally do try to hurt us or make our lives difficult, there is also a large amount of what be called healthy or existential suffering <u>built into life</u>. Our loved ones do not get old and die because of some terrible blunder we have made. They get old and die because that is the way life works on Planet Earth. As Rollo May points out in *Love and Will*,[276] Americans have concentrated so hard on changing the things that we can change, that we have lost a sense of noble acceptance concerning the things that we cannot change. The premier symbol for this unbalanced attitude is Captain Ahab in the novel, *Moby Dick*, who must destroy the whale, which represents all that Captain Ahab cannot control.

Judith Viorst introduces her readers to an even deeper complexity: that we are bound to suffer in life many times <u>when we are doing just the right thing</u>! Which is to say that every great developmental step forward in life involves relinquishing the comforts of the previous step, and these are real losses. Learning to eat means you mother does not feed you any more. Learning to walk means that your parents do not carry you as much any more (and, of course, eventually you weigh so much that your parents *never* carry you again). This pattern of "necessary losses" begins in infancy and follows us all through life, according to Viorst, providing some periods of terrible ambivalence along the way.

For example, the very young child experiences an intense conflict between wanting to stay fused with mommy and wanting to exercise newly developing skills of walking, running and exploring the world. This generates the "terrible two's" during which the toddler engages in a lot of help me/don't help me behaviors. This happens again during the teen years when young people both want to be sheltered from the demands of the adult world and also want to participate in the adult world. Most young people eventually opt for independence and responsibility, but it is not a choice without its costs. Starting life on one's own is often the most difficult task the young person has ever undertaken. The stresses involved in creating a new, independent identity make people more vulnerable to episodes of schizophrenia during the years just after leaving

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[275]Judith Viorst, *Necessary Losses* (New York: Ballantine, 1987).
[276]Rollo May, *Love and Will* (New York: Norton, 1969).

home than at any other time in life.[277]

Continuing through the life-cycle, Viorst discusses the way that establishing a family of one's own means redrawing the lines of familial loyalties and letting go of the relationship one once had with one's parents. After having readjusted one's loyalties in order to raise children, each parent has the experience of being very important in the lives of their children and then not being so important any more, *and that is if everything goes well!* In our mid-life years, when most of our parents die, we lose our illusions of immortality, but this loss opens the way for a deeper encounter with the mystery, beauty and terror of being human, opens the way to a deeper integrity.[278]

Thus, at every stage along life's way an important part of being a person is to accept and experience what might be called the natural sorrows of being human. What is called for here is an attitude of deep compassion and acceptance, for one's own suffering and for every one else's. Buddhists stress the idea of "no blame." Since we are all in same boat, one can grieve and weep without shame. How different this is from tough-guy prescriptions of masculinity. Unfortunately, tough guys can end up being very troubled people. For example, in the years since the Vietnam war ended, the number of veterans who have committed suicide has exceeded the number of soldiers who were killed in combat in Vietnam. Both Thomas Scheff and Carl Rogers would counsel us that our inevitable, periodic feelings of grief need to be acknowledged and expressed. The attempt to hold them <u>back</u> (and to maintain a facade of invulnerability) paradoxically puts us in the position of holding <u>on</u> to them, so that we cannot open ourselves to new experiences.

Turning once again to the role of communication and conversation in the unfolding of our personhood, it is in giving voice to our sorrows that we work through them. Rogers sees this happening because putting our feelings into words allows the feelings to come into awareness. Scheff sees this happening because putting our feelings into words allows us to adopt the slightly distanced participant-observer stance that facilitates emotional discharge. I see the crucial factor as being the real or imagined

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[277]Jerrold S. Maxmen, *Essential Psychopathology* (New York: Norton, 1986), 147.

"accepting other" who, by affirming the inherent goodness of the sufferer, relieves the sufferer of the burden of shame associated with suffering. All these dynamics are probably at work. To the degree that communication training includes helping people get in touch with their feelings, such training touches on this lifelong developmental issue. First, by helping people express their own feelings in more satisfying and perhaps more diplomatic ways (note the recurring themes of asserting and communing). And second, by helping people to feel safe with emotions so that they will be more able to be a compassionate and reassuring witness to the emotional expression of others.

The contrasting imperative to opening oneself to the sorrows of life, is to open oneself to the joys of life. Joy, it appears to me, is even more complex than sorrow; and there are not nearly as many books about it.

Joy and sorrow appear to me to be deeply intertwined in that, along the lines of the above discussion, if people numb themselves to avoid the inevitable sorrows of life, they will probably not be able to feel any of the joys, either. So, paradoxically, facing one's sorrows might actually be the first step toward a more joyous life. In the following few pages I will explore some of the possible contexts in which we might understand the place of joy in a fully human life.

Although the American Declaration of Independence affirms each person's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, it is not clear that one can actually pursue happiness in a direct way. In a filmed lecture that I watched a few years ago, Viktor Frankl rather apologetically and diplomatically explained to his audience that the Declaration of Independence was simply wrong about the happiness part. Happiness, he insisted, came out of meaningfulness. To be happy, he advised, we needed to give ourselves to a worthy project and pour our effort into it. This project could be a great love, a crusade to save the world or any large project that moved us deeply. What was important was that we reach beyond ourselves to something larger.

Biologically, feelings of exalted satisfaction seem to be related to the successful exertion of effort, having both physical, cognitive and contextual components. For

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[278]Yalom devotes four chapters to the way people cope or fail to cope with the reality of death, a major theme in existential psychology. See Yalom, Irvin D., *Existential Psychotherapy.* (New York: Basic Books, 1980) chaps. 2-5.

example, experienced long distance runners report entering into such states of exalted satisfaction after they have been running for several hours. But prisoners forced to run for long periods of time on threat of death would probably not experience such states.

Studies of manic-depressive disorder suggest that a continuous flood of intense good feelings, unrelated to any life activities, can be disorienting.[279] Attempts to create instant good feelings with drugs are a well-documented disaster in the USA. (But there are many factors at work in this issue since many people who are drawn to use drugs may already have lives full of problems. The use of plant intoxicants in traditional cultures of the Andes and the Amazon is usually not accompanied by social breakdowns.)

Our words for joy vary according to the time frame in which the feelings of elation unfold. Thus we usually speak of pleasure and delight to indicate feelings that emerge quickly, whereas joy, well-being and fulfillment can refer both to momentary feelings and to positive feelings that unfold over months or years.

Humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers,[280] Abraham Maslow,[281] and William Schutz[282] assert very strongly that human beings have an inborn need to grow toward a full-humanness that includes creativity, awareness, genuineness and emotional aliveness, among other qualities. Our feelings of fulfillment, in this view, will reflect the degree to which we have guided our lives in those directions. Rogers and Maslow are thus similar to Frankl in that they view joy as a kind of sublime byproduct, in their case, of our effort to cultivate deeply human qualities of character. Schutz sees joy emerging in our lives at three different levels. First, at the bodily level, through health, exercise and the experience of vitality. Second, at the interpersonal level, through a capacity to include others in our lives, a capacity to influence and be influenced by others, and a capacity for affection. And third, at the social and organizational level, through changing the dynamics of families, schools and workplaces to be more supportive of full human development.[283]

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[279]See Maxmen, *Essential Psychopathology*, chap. 11, for a discussion of affective disorders.
[280]Carl R. Rogers, *A Way of Being* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980).
[281]Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature.*
[282]William C. Schutz, *Joy: Expanding Human Awareness* (New York: Grove Press, 1969).
[283]None of the feelings described in this paragraph fare well in the exploitive and highly competitive atmosphere of market economies, and none of the authors deals well with the psychological

There appears to be a consensus among thoughtful writers on the topic that joy is like the fruit of a complex tree. In the short run we cannot produce this fruit by acts of will, just as there is nothing we can do a particular twig on an apple tree to force it to instantly produce an apple. But there are many things we can do to nurture the entire tree. The things we <u>can</u> do appear to me to cluster around the themes of love, work, creativity, sense of beauty and sense of gratitude. Human happiness appears to be strongly context-bound. We become happy in the context of loving and being loved (which includes understanding others and being understood by others). We become happy in the context of competence and success in work, in the context of imaginative and creative play and meaning-making activity, in the context of cultivating the experience of beauty in art and nature, and in the context of cultivating a deeper sense of gratitude for the miracles of everyday life. Maslow wrote somewhere that the greatest miracle in life is that the Sun comes up in the morning.

The closest we may get to the direct cultivation of joy concerns our basic stance toward experience. In the face of loss, sorrow and uncertainty, it is possible to give up on the process of giving ourselves to life. We can adopt a stance of "If I never love or trust anyone again, I will never be abandoned or disappointed." The social and cultural aspects of such withdrawal from full engagement with life and community are the theme of Cristopher Lasch's *The Minimal Self*.[284] Lasch argues that the continually impending disasters of modern life cause people to gradually relinquish their ties to their communities and families. "Under siege, the self contracts to a defensive core, armed against adversity."[285]

But there is an alternative to this attitude. Part of the wisdom of middle age, catalyzed most often by the death of one's parents and one's children leaving home, can be that people are worth loving in spite of the fact that they get old and die, in spite of the fact that they leave us. Rather than setting our standards of personal entitlement so high that life always disappoints us, we can reorganize our expectations so that life delights us

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utopianism implicit in their positions. I believe that this is a conflict worth understanding, but an examination of this issue is beyond the scope of the present study.

[284]Cristopher Lasch *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: Norton, 1985).

[285]Ibid., 15.

more often. That appears to me to be the central dynamic at work in the practice of gratitude. Through meditation, prayer, relaxation and other forms of temporarily letting go of our needs, concerns, mental models and preoccupations, we can come to experience more of everyday life (the Sun, the sky, the sound of children playing down the street) *as a gift*.[286]

In conclusion, there is a mountain of evidence that we need to face our sorrows more productively, that we need to grieve the inevitable wounds and losses of life more consciously and thus more satisfyingly. So my suggestion that opening oneself to sorrow is an important part of human development appears to be on solid ground. My assertion of the complementary imperative, that we need also to open ourselves to the experience of joy in order to become fully human, is much more problematic. Human history is proof that people do not need to be happy, or fully-developed, in order to survive. And happiness appears to be not an activity or experience in itself but rather mostly a byproduct of more fundamental activities and experiences in a person's life, such as loving, meaning-making and the full realization of one's potential. As Brammer notes, "happiness as a goal in itself is very elusive."[287] Yet we know that we have the capacity to experience joy and I think we intuit correctly that a life not touched by joy is a life only half lived. In the face of all this mixed evidence, how can I defend my proposed developmental imperative to open oneself to joy?

I believe that one answer to this is that the two sides of the joy and sorrow polarity cannot really be separated from one another. Although, for the sake of argument, I have tried to discuss and justify them one at a time,[288] speaking first of sorrow and then of joy, what I have in fact been arguing for is that we open ourselves to the full range of our own feelings, which, if we are fully engaged with life, will always include a complex mix of both joy and sorrow, elation and frustration. The Zen philosopher Alan Watts spoke frequently on this topic of inseparable polarities, gently reminding his audiences that to want joy without sorrow was like wanting the existence of "up" without "down" or the

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[286]For a discussion of this attitude see David Steindl-Rast, *Gratefulness, The Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

[287]Brammer, *The Helping Relationship*, 12.

[288]In this particular argument the idea of "both A and B" does not break down to "A taken separately" and "B taken separately."

existence of "hot" without "cold."[289] If we want to have good feelings, we will probably have to open ourselves to all of our feelings, however long a journey that may be.

A final argument in support of an imperative to open ourselves to joy is that we have, even in very painful circumstances, some creative freedom in how we respond to life. (This is the central theme of Viktor Frankl's work.) Because we <u>can</u> have some influence over how we respond to life, one measure of a fully human life is how successfully a person manages to choose/create gratitude rather than resentment and hope rather than despair.
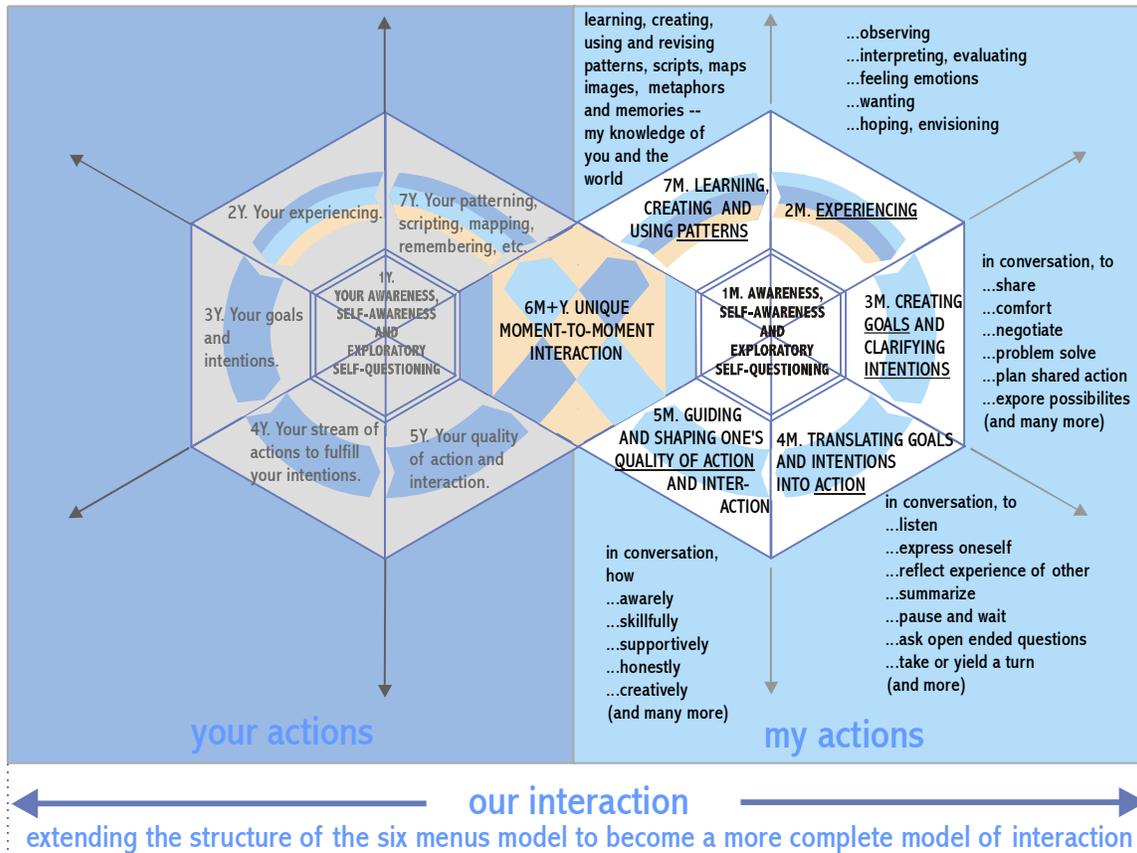
10.9. Conclusion

So my study ends on the themes of "whole systems" and "interconnectedness" with which it began. Our feelings are probably as complex and interwoven as the world in which we live and all our hopes about and pictures of that world, since our feelings express our unique encounters with that world. Returning to my theme of the unfolding persons in interpersonal communication, it is in the telling of our feelings of both joy and sorrow to an accepting listener that we bring them more fully into awareness, that they become more completely <u>our</u> feelings. Thus, to help people learn how to put their experiences into words, how to share them with others, and now to receive the sharings of others, is to help them weave the web of life. I believe that it is <u>in the telling of our life stories to one another</u>, largely in and through conversations, that <u>we come to realize that we actually have lives</u> about which to tell stories. And finally, to understand another person and to be understood, both processes that unfold in and through conversation, are a large part of loving and being loved.

[Postscript, 2000: I have expanded on these ideas about how we become persons in an essay that is Reading 7-3 in *The Seven Challenges: A Workbook and Reader About Communicating More Cooperatively*, available on the Internet at: www.coopcomm.org/workbook]

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[289]Alan W. Watts. *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*. (New York: Collier Books, 1967), 22.

learning, creating, using and revising patterns, scripts, maps images, metaphors and memories -- my knowledge of you and the world

...observing
...interpreting, evaluating
...feeling emotions
...wanting
...hoping, envisioning

2Y. Your experiencing.

7Y. Your patterning, scripting, mapping, remembering, etc.

7M. LEARNING, CREATING AND USING PATTERNS

2M. EXPERIENCING

1Y. YOUR AWARENESS, SELF-AWARENESS AND EXPLORATORY SELF-QUESTIONING

3Y. Your goals and intentions.

6M+Y. UNIQUE MOMENT-TO-MOMENT INTERACTION

1M. AWARENESS, SELF-AWARENESS AND EXPLORATORY SELF-QUESTIONING

3M. CREATING GOALS AND CLARIFYING INTENTIONS

in conversation, to
...share
...comfort
...negotiate
...problem solve
...plan shared action
...expore possibilites
(and many more)

4Y. Your stream of actions to fulfill your intentions.

5Y. Your quality of action and interaction.

5M. GUIDING AND SHAPING ONE'S QUALITY OF ACTION AND INTER-ACTION

4M. TRANSLATING GOALS AND INTENTIONS INTO ACTION

in conversation, how
...awarely
...skillfully
...supportively
...honestly
...creatively
(and many more)

in conversation, to
...listen
...express oneself
...reflect experience of other
...summarize
...pause and wait
...ask open ended questions
...take or yield a turn
(and more)

your actions

my actions

our interaction

extending the structure of the six menus model to become a more complete model of interaction

(Work in progress on the geometry of dialogue, May 2002)