10. DOUBLE LOOP FEEDBACK[1] [29]

promote the awareness of how one learns to learn

The times when the teacher corrects performance are often the most difficult as well as the most significant. It is easier to identify errors and deficiencies in the actions of others than to communicate corrections to them in a way that continues their engagement. Because people rarely produce actions that do not make sense to themselves (they act intentionally), they naturally tend to become defensive, confused, or ashamed when criticized or given advice. Yet individualized correction is often the key to improved performance. An effective feedback procedure enables reflection and self-correction without fostering hostility or defensiveness.

Double loop feedback is a method of providing correctives in a way that maintains the learner's continued engagement in the process of acquiring competence and self-confidence. It sequences the statements teacher's make by starting with least inferential and examining both the learner's performance and the evaluator's assumptions at each stage. In double loop learning an open-ended cycle is created where the teacher and the learner cooperatively examine both the learner's performance and the underlying perspectives the teacher brings to regard that performance.

Optimal correction is possible when both parties responsibly work for error detection at each level of inference before proceeding to the next. In other words, get the facts right first; then work to agree upon what "most people would agree" those facts to mean. As opposed to the natural tendency to think of judgments and opinions first, this procedure holds them in abeyance.

Step 1. Objective Description of Facts

State the facts as you see them:

    a. "There are 14 misspelled words here."

    b. "Since I assigned the class the task, you have asked me four questions."

    c. "You pointed your finger at the person you addressed."

Get agreement, for correcting errors may not be possible unless both parties agree to a common set of facts.

Step 2. Culturally Accepted (socially-constructed) Meaning

Describe what a jury or group of informed, dispassionate observers would conclude:

    a. "Most people would say it hasn't been spell-checked.Do you agree?"

    b. "Most people would agree that you are using me as the first resource, instead of the handouts or your classmates. Do you think that is right?"

    c. "Most people would say that non-verbal gesture implies an adversarial rather than cooperative stance, don't you think?"

Again, get agreement. Usually the learner will either justify or correct when the behavior is recognized as holding an accepted meaning. This level of inference is the same used by journalists and anthropologists to describe events and actions as viewed from a culturally specific viewpoint. That viewpoint, too, is also suspect and, to be fair, should be examined simultaneously—thus the term "double loop."

Step 3. Judgments and Personal Opinions

After the above have been discussed and agreed upon, the judgments of both parties can be stated without inducing animosity or defensiveness. At times it may be wise to check first with the recipient before moving to this stage: "Would you like my opinion?"

    a. "That many mistakes imply you either don't care or stop before it is truly done."

    b. "I would like to see you find more answers independently."

    c. "It is more effective to speak about yourself than about others."