



## Conversational Framework Screencast: Transcript

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As we grapple with how best to develop online learning designs it's good to remember that they're based on exactly the same theories about how students learn as all our conventional approaches to teaching and learning. Students' learning processes still work as they always did, but our ways of coaxing them to learn have to be very different from our conventional methods.

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The Conversational Framework was developed to address this question. It's a distillation of the main theories of teaching and learning, and is the simplest way to represent the teaching learning process as basically, a series of exchanges between a learner and a teacher, and between a learner and their peers, at two levels: of concepts and practices.

The point of it is to help us test the value to students of our conventional and online learning designs.

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The heart of the framework is a simple way to think about how a learner is learning. They have some concepts, or knowledge, and they have some practices, or skills.

- At the concept level, there are continual iterations of ideas, as they gradually develop a concept, and join it up with other concepts.
- At the practice level as well, there are continual iterations of actions that gradually develop a skill, and then gradually more complex skills
- It's also important that the concepts influence the learner's practice, and v.v., in another continuous cycle. The theory says that for learning in *formal education*, we as teachers, have to make sure these continual cycles are actually working, and students are indeed developing their concepts and practices together.

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The teacher does that by engaging the student in thinking about concepts, and by setting up the learning environment for them to put those ideas into practice:

- if we want them to understand equations, we give them practice in solving them
- if we teach them about democracy, we run a mock election
- and the other students are important too – because they discuss and debate concepts, they practice skills together, and share their practical experience with each other.



With this basic framework, we can now use it to represent all the main types of learning we use in education.

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We can link each type of learning to a specific part of the framework, beginning with learning through acquisition.

- where the teacher is communicating concepts and ideas

That changes some of the learner's concepts,

- and then more presentation changes them some more – or so we hope!

But the students do not need to generate any ideas themselves

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Learning through inquiry, or investigation is different because

- the student explores or questions the teachers' concepts
- and use what they find to generates ideas of what to look for next
- So these continued iterations produce more conceptual activity by the learner than learning through acquisition, because they're engaged in generating the questions and finding the answers in the teacher's concepts (i.e. from the teacher, a book, or a website).

The more cycles there are, the more opportunities they have to change and develop their ideas.

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For 'learning through practice', the learner uses the learning environment set up by the teacher.

- They are asked to achieve a goal
- they generate an action
- they receive feedback;
- then respond with a revised action, with more feedback
- And they may also be encouraged to use their practice to change their concept, and v.v, and so generate a better action.

All those iterations help to develop both concepts and practices and the links between them

- showing just how important this type of learning is.

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The same iterations happen with 'learning through discussion',

- where the social construction of ideas helps learners develop their concepts; then generate questions, they receive feedback from their peers, and respond with answers to



their questions, and again these iterations engage them in the process of developing their concepts further.

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Similarly, for 'learning through collaboration',

- each learner is learning through practice by using the learning environment.

- At the same time, they are discussing
- and then sharing practice, and also linking the two.

Again, this type of learning helps them develop both concepts and practice, but in this case enriched by this social learning context. Collaboration takes them beyond discussion to having to negotiate what they do in practice, so it's more engaging than discussion alone, or practice alone. They have feedback both from the practice environment and from discussion and negotiation with their peers.

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And finally, 'learning through production', is where

- they reflect on and represent what they've learned to communicate it to the teacher. So they connect up concepts and practice, and then produce an essay, or performance, or presentation to show what they have learned.
- and then the teacher's feedback should enhance and consolidate their learning.

Learning through production is what we're using in assessment. This where students produce evidence to demonstrate what they've learned. Having to produce something for the teacher, or for the class, is motivating - that's why we use assessment: to persuade students to focus on their learning process.

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This is the complete Conversational Framework, embracing all 6 learning types, which all work to complement and enhance each other, while each is distinctive from the others.

Of course, it is a simplification, but that's what we need, as we design for learning - it has to be a usable representation of how students learn, not over-complex.

It is widely used now, and does seem to be a useful way for teachers to think through what a learning design has to do to help students learn.