

## Impact Studies

September 11, 2003

I love the change of seasons: from winter to spring, from spring to the hot days of summer, from summer to the crisp, blue-sky autumn. There is a renewal here that is deep and utterly natural. There are seasons in one's life, as well. Each change: taking a new job, finding a life partner, going on a significant journey—brings that same seasonal renewal.

In evaluating adult learning, we might look to seasonal change as an analogue. Initially, the excitement of folks after a five day course entitled *Learning to Listen-Learning to Teach* is as palpable as the first day of spring, or summer, or fall. Learning has occurred and it is intoxicating! Transfer—the use of that learning in new situations—at work, at home, in the community—is more challenging. The tedious work of preparation, the tough work of research, the struggle to complete and use the Seven Design Steps effectively becomes more and more taxing, like the dog days of August bearing out the heat of summer.

Transfer is a discipline. Without it, the joy of learning is a bubble bursting in the first blast of the wind of reality. Transfer is the opportunity for constructive use of the principles and practices, fitting them to your own context like a fine leather glove to your hand. Fitting them means changing them, and that is part of the joy and creativity of transfer.

Impact is a September Day with blue skies and cool breezes... it is hoped for and celebrated when it arrives. Impact is the purpose of it all: the change in organizational systems, personal skill competency, group intimacy and collaboration that makes the whole learning and transfer effort worthwhile. Impact must be celebrated and documented. Tell it like it is! Show us not *the money* but the significant change for the better that the educational process has wrought.

I propose that impact indicators must be set forth with complete honesty; they must be gathered through comprehensive sampling and through collaborative responses with all participants in the sample. There must be a continuous review of these indicators to prove integration of new skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

We need ongoing **Impact Studies** that will demonstrate the effectiveness of dialogue education, using qualitative and quantitative indicators. As we celebrate and document impact, we will feel a renewal akin to the feeling we have as the seasons change. Mother Nature's own praxis!