

The Praxis of Dialogue

by Jane Vella, PhD

One of my favorite axioms is: There are three things that make effective learning happen, in this order: *time, time and time.*

While the wry humor in that axiom always gets a belated laugh, the significance and meaning it offers is not at all trivial. I discovered the biology behind my simple axiom as I reread, with delight, [Norman Doidge's](#) amazing book, "The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science."

Consider the implications of this paragraph from page 24:

Traditional rehabilitation exercises typically ended after a few weeks, when a patient stopped improving, or "plateaued," and doctors lost the motivation to continue. But Bach-y-Rita, based on his knowledge of nerve growth, began to argue that these learning plateaus were temporary — part of a plasticity-based learning cycle — in which stages of learning are followed by periods of consolidation. Though there was no apparent progress in the consolidation stage, biological changes were happening internally, as new skills became more automatic and refined.

In our present school system, we rush students from one 45-minute session to another, without any reflection time or **periods of consolidation**. This lovely story of a dinner table conversation between a father and his six-year-old son captures this principle:

Dad: What was the best thing that happened at school today, Tim?

Tim: Recess! We went out into the garden!

I see that Tim knew he needed a period of consolidation; he wanted to learn! He knew praxis: action with reflection long before he took the Foundations of Dialogue Education course!

How can we re-design our courses, webinars, or learning tasks to include what the brain is telling us it needs: a quiet time, a period of consolidation, the opportunity to **reflect on** the new information or skill or attitude we just met?

In Johannesburg, South Africa years ago, I was doing a course on Dialogue Education with law professors from the university. My friend Tricia, whom I met at a Quaker meeting, sat in on the

course to observe the process. I shall never forget her comment at the end of the first day: “That is amazing, Jane. Have you ever thought of using quiet?” Tricia challenged me then to consider The Praxis of Dialogue. Norman Doidge offered me today the biology behind it.

When have you used quiet to enhance learning in a course or workshop?

When have you given yourself a period of consolidation to ensure your own learning?

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