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LINEARITY- A RADICAL APPROACH

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Resumé

The author calls in question the traditional methods of competence assignment. He states that there are intellectual difficulties in creating a different approach. However, by drawing on contemporary and historic texts, and taking a creative radical look he has developed a new approach to human competence development which he calls 'linearity'. The author concludes by offering a stark warning about the consequences of his conclusions.

Whilst I am not by nature a radical thinker, I have over the past three years been forced to question the bases of the traditional competence acquisition systems. By chance I read two texts in the same week. The first was the standard facilitator's text, Dr. D. Kornbluth's 'Post-modernism and Competence- Process not Product'. The second was an article entitled 'Quo Vadis, Dominus' by 'D' in the June '24 issue of 'Underground', on Internet. The choice of a despised dead European language for the title was of course deliberately inflammatory, but I did not let that distract me. Nowadays it is uncommon to be forced to set thesis and antithesis side by side, and it was a startling and illuminating experience. Kornbluth's respected views suddenly took on a less than satisfactory face. I set D's ideas against Kornbluth's and developed the five modules, or strands, of linearity, which are described below.

In the period which followed, my starting point was the growing set of problems with the current approach. To remind the reader, these are as follows:

1 The current modular system tends towards client instability, there being positive feedback. A client who succeeds on each set of modules is likely to be more successful later. A client who performs less well, and has to be reassessed, has less time for subsequent modules and lower self esteem. With each module which passes this tendency increases. Thus a client who starts to do badly, tends to get worse. This is, of course, known as 'majoring'.

2 We have done well in ensuring that all modules are discrete and separate. It is becoming apparent, however, that clients are unable to see the link between similar competences acquired in different modules. This effect is well-known, and generally known as 'fragmentation'. It is also known as *envy queue*, for which the etymology is uncertain.

3 Facilitators are having to enable in a wide variety of competence areas. There has been a marked tendency for their competence relevance to decline due to lack of time for their area of interest.

4 The content of modules has become narrower and less demanding over time. This is a consequence of them being facilitated by a large number of people, due to the need for flexibility and multi-mode delivery. Facilitators with fewer competences found the content too personally demanding and asked for simplification to solve 'client overloading'.

5 There has been a ground-swell of popular opinion which questions the basis of what was called 'anti-elitism' in the last two decades of the twentieth century. As always such revolutionary thinking is more prevalent in young clients. Probably the 'Egoist Movement' is the most vociferous, in demanding a return to what it calls 'rigour' and 'structure'. Despite still being underground, this group is starting to have an effect on mainstream thinking.

6 Traditional criterion-referenced modules, and the credit accumulation and transfer system, mean that a client of marginal ability, who just about satisfies the criteria for each module, still gets a degree. This so-called 'limbo effect', also known as 'hurdle skimming', has become more marked as a result of point 4 above.

7 The technique of 'module manoeuvre' is well-known. Now that all modules are available on one 200 Exabyte disk, a well-counselled client of limited ability can steer a course through those which have a lower content rating. The growth of international group sessions, with 'Autotrans', has meant that a client can choose world-wide.

THE LINEAR APPROACH

The new approach I call 'Linear' because it perceives competence acquisition not as a sequence of discrete steps, but as a continuous process. I must warn facilitators not to react too strongly against these notions, but to keep what used to be called an 'open mind'. Following further research I discovered that there are precedents for these ideas, in the renaissance of the sixteenth century and the 'Universities' of the 1970s.

THE FIVE MODULES OF LINEARITY

LEARNING

In what used to be called the 'learning process' clients, then called 'students', are presented with a structure of integrated acquisition processes, rather than the current 'facilitated osmosis'.

SUBJECT

This is my term for a coherent group of competences.

IDEA

This is the name for the abstract criteria for grouping similar events.

INTEGRATION

This is the name for both the competence acquisition structure and for the resulting cross-linking of ideas.

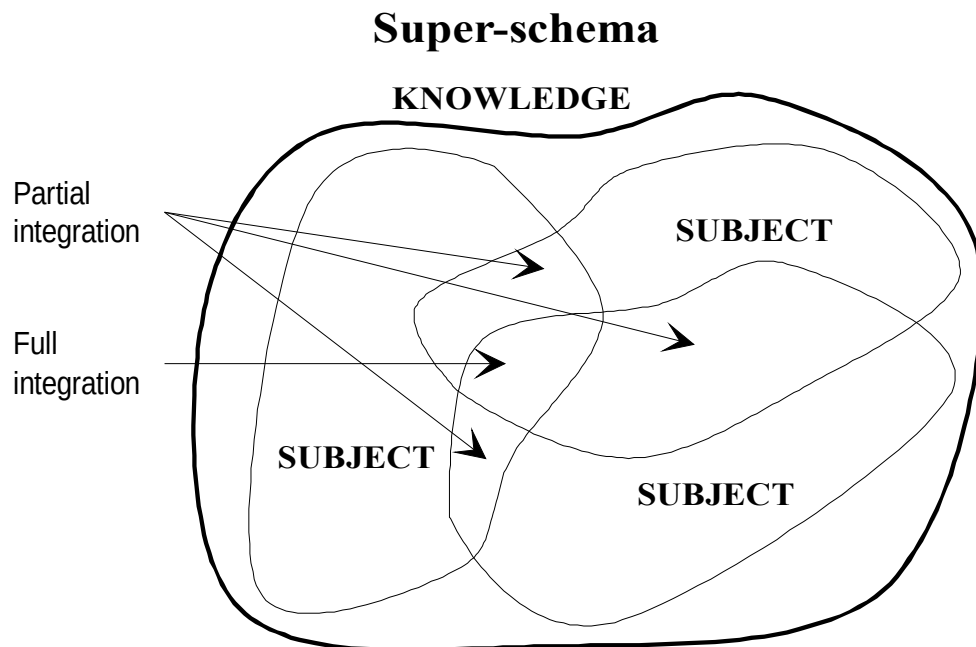
KNOWLEDGE

This is not the 'canon' properly rejected in the post-modernist nineties. This term means 'fresh ideas which are based on, and found in, events in the real world'.

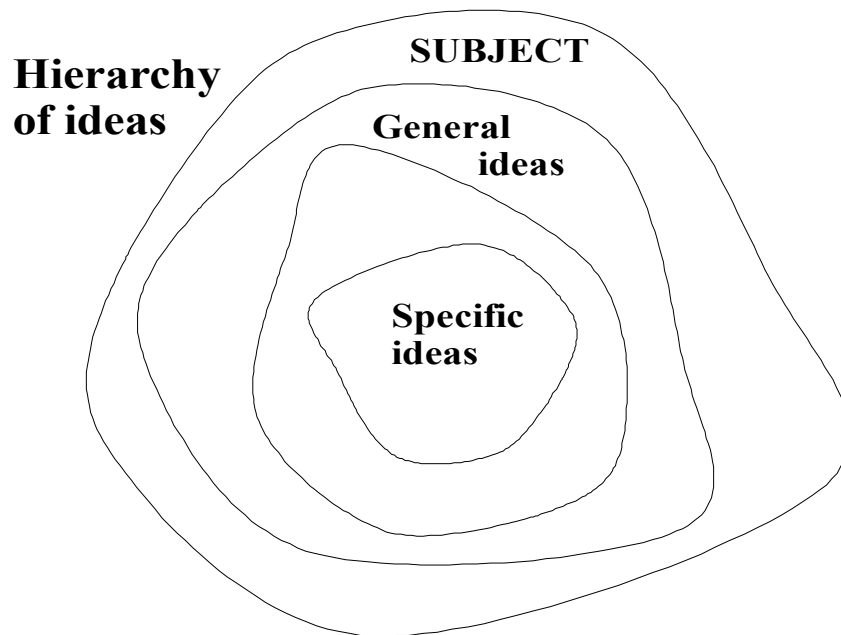
Where these terms are used they are printed in slant to allow the reader to refer to the glossary above.

SUPER-SCHEMA

The simplest way to relate to these new notions is by a diagram.



Note the move away from the hard boxes of the modular schema, to soft areas. This is meant to indicate an adaptation to the most recent discoveries about human behaviour. The most significant is that of 'non-homogeneity', that is the notion that there is 'no one right answer', and that people differ.



This diagram shows that *ideas* might have a hierarchy. Acquisition of simple ones allow the client to move on to more complex ones.

THE SIXTH NEW MODULE

Of course we need a new type of facilitator to carry out this work. One term, which has an etymology, is '*teacher*'. From the same roots comes the term '*specialist*', which delineates a teacher with deeper *knowledge* in some areas. To indicate usage, one might employ a *specialist teacher of mathematics*.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE DANGERS?

There is a danger that despite having acquired knowledge, or an 'integrated world-picture' of ideas, a student might arrive at the wrong conclusion. Such a conclusion might be wrong because it does not correspond with perceived reality or because it is contrary to convention. In either case the student will feel threatened and might suffer mental problems, particularly following the normal peer realignment sessions.

There is a more fundamental problem. If the above ideas prove successful, then people will conclude that, if our authority can be criticised over one thing, it might be open to question over others. This goes to the foundation of our world and is not to be embarked upon lightly.

I unearthed the term *learning* during my researches. It appears to have been lost in the late 90s. I was uncertain whether it was wise to include it. Apparently, as used originally, it allowed clients, or indeed anyone at all, to acquire *knowledge* by their own routes, outside of those laid down by authority. Let us hope that there is no re-emergence of this notion. The financial stability of the competence industry would be threatened.