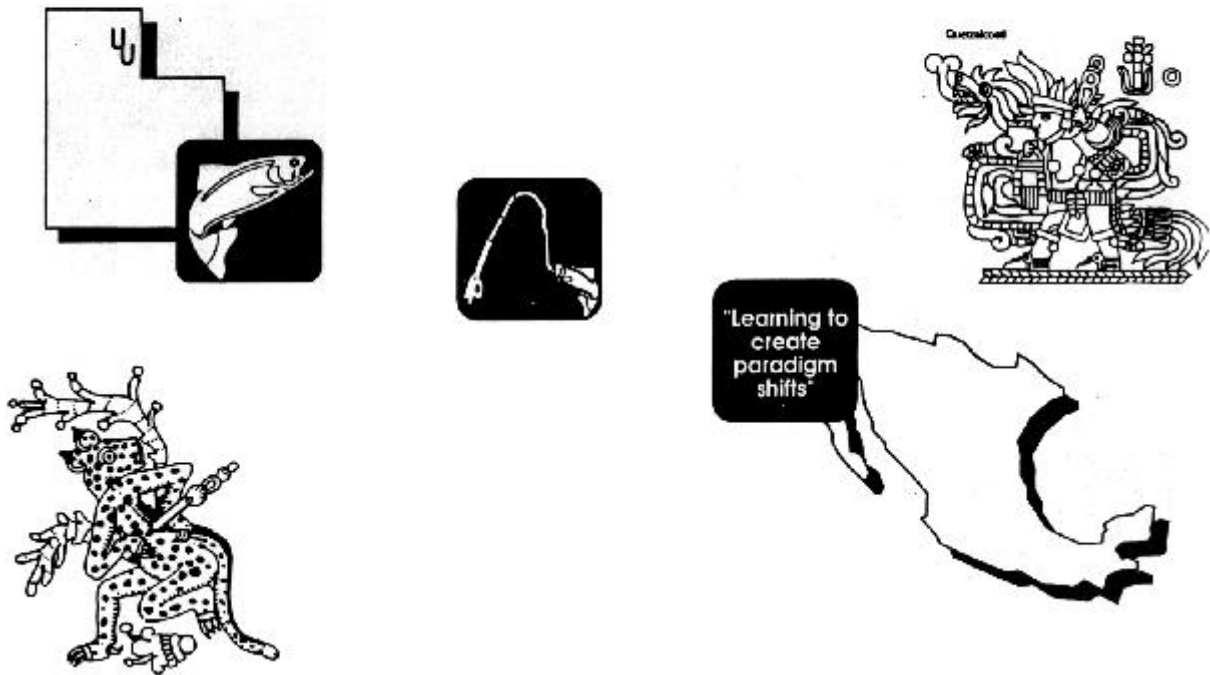


**CULTURAL DIVERSITY, COMMUNITY SERVICE,  
AND LEVELS OF LEARNING:  
A TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY TO MEXICO**



Like most of life's pivotal moments it was unlooked for and unexpected. I was standing in the rain in Piskarevskoye Memorial Cemetery in Leningrad, wet shoulder to wet shoulder with Ivan, a young student. I spoke no Russian; he spoke no English. He pointed to a Russian word in my Russian-English dictionary; I read the corresponding English words: "How, what." Cold rain wrinkled the pages of our communication channel as he repeatedly flipped from Russian word to Russian word, pausing after each word so I could read the corresponding English:

**"How, what... to be... dream, vision... from, of... for... mode of living... together"**

His dark eyes, bright with anticipation, fixed my eyes. The question was not rhetorical; his heart demanded an answer.

What kinds of answers might we give to Ivan's profound question?

As an educator, the direction that my answer to Ivan's question will take is to offer another question: How can I point my students not to an answer to Ivan's question but to a means of discovering their own answers? This approach was well expressed by the eminent mathematician, George Polya. In writing about his early days as a student of

mathematics, he described a sense of insecurity that arose as he saw various problems solved and various theorems proved:

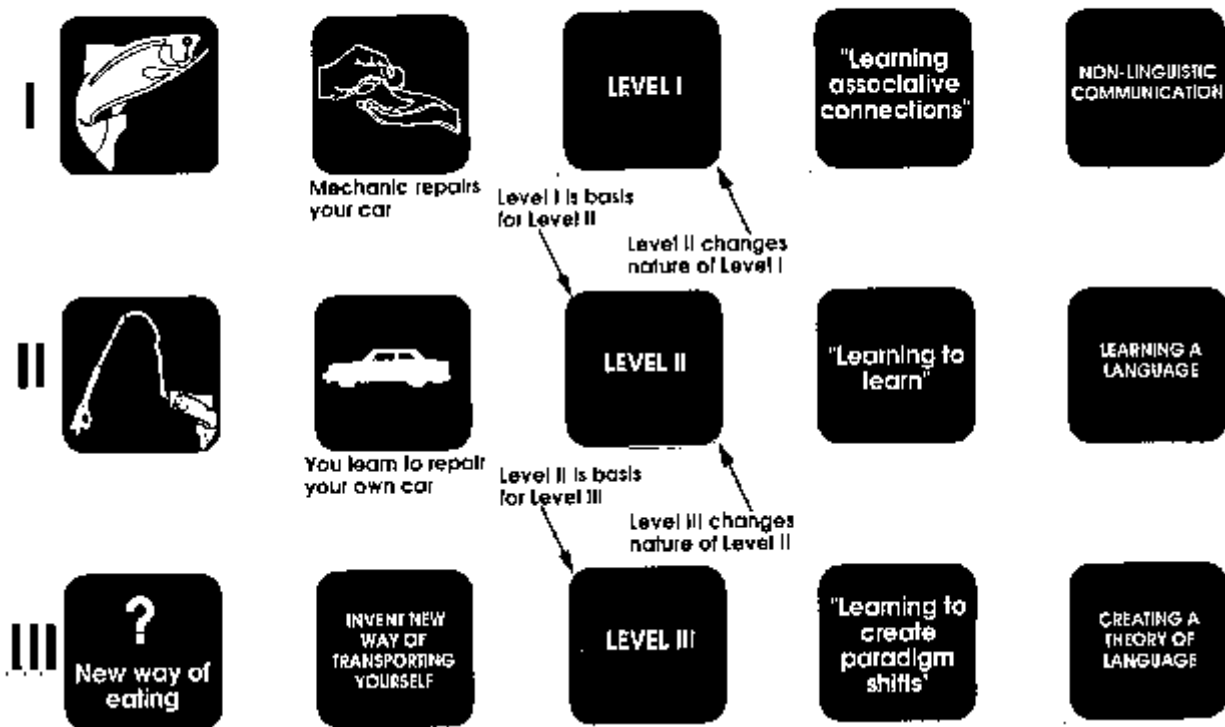
Yes, the solution seems to work, it appears to be correct; but how is it possible to invent such a solution? Yes, this experiment seems to work, this appears to be a fact; but how can people discover such facts? And how could I invent or discover such things by myself?

This experience is not limited to mathematics, engineering, and science. It applies equally to a well-formulated philosophical principle, a telling reply to an ethical quandary, or a balanced response to a crucial social issue. Yes it is good, I find myself saying, to meet a great mind and comprehend that mind's solution; but how can I come to that place where the solution flows from me?



The kind of distinction Polya is referring to has been classified by social scientists and educators as “levels of learning.” Level I learning is the foundation for all other types of learning and is based on simple associative connections. One activity at this level is the rote memorization of facts. Level I teaching can be likened to giving hungry people fish so that they have dinner tonight. Level II is “learning to learn.” This includes problem solving, learning to communicate, learning the principles discovered by our culture, learning social skills, and even learning skills which are so frequently and highly practiced that they become automatic character traits, values and paradigmatic world views. Level II teaching can be likened to teaching people to fish so that they can feed themselves for the rest of their lives. Most of what we call “success” within a culture is due to the ability to learn at Level II.

## META COGNITIVE PRINCIPLES Levels of Learning



Level III refers to learning how to create paradigm shifts, whether that shift occurs quietly within, as in a personal reorganization, or occurs in a way that creates major social changes. It refers to learning about the larger sequences of experience, the larger contexts within which personal and social paradigms are embedded. Teaching at level III can be likened to teaching people how to develop their own new way of feeding themselves; and,

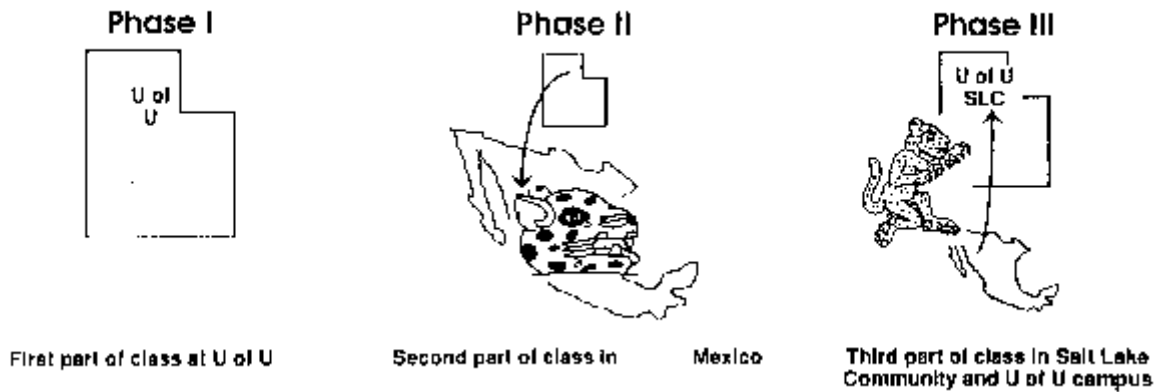
as such, it addresses the questions posed by professor Polya.

To emphasize the roles of Learning II and Learning III, consider values. Learning values occurs at Level II and is an essential form of learning. Yet recent technological and cultural evolution has forced our culture to consider new ethical issues requiring the modification and generation of values—e.g., thirty years ago few people anticipated the need for environmental values or values resulting from test-tube conception. The creation of new values occurs at the level of Learning III. The speed with which ideas are changing is accelerating; surely our students will be called upon to create new values to face new ethical and social issues that we cannot anticipate today.

Our students will also have to create new paradigms to encompass rapidly expanding knowledge. Without the Level III ability to create new paradigms to encompass this rapidly expanding knowledge, our students, indeed, our culture, will be poorly equipped to meet the world of tomorrow. In effect, we are, at least metaphorically, faced with the question of how to create the “Gorbachevs” and “Einsteins” of the future.

Within this framework, I have, as part of my answer to Ivan’s question, developed a class, “Global Psychology,” that is offered as a Liberal Education senior seminar. In this course my goal is not to teach students my world view. Rather, the central aim of this course is to teach students the social science principles and techniques, along with epistemological assumptions, that allow each of them to learn at Level III and to create a world view, a vision, a dream so compelling that other people will want to join it.

# CLASS OUTLINE



First part of class at U of U

Second part of class in Mexico

Third part of class in Salt Lake Community and U of U campus

## Meta-Cognitive Principles

- ◆ Levels of learning
- ◆ Multiple descriptions
  - Multi-cultural viewpoints
- ◆ Action in the world
- ◆ Life-based epistemology
- ◆ Principles for creating your own theory of humanness in the context of the planet.
- ◆ Writing intensive
  - 3 1-to-5 page papers per week

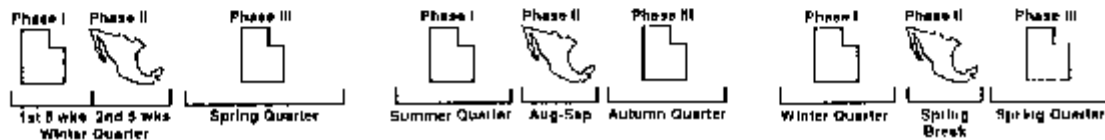
## Continuation of Learning Meta-Cognitive Principles in the Context of Meaningful Action in the World

- ◆ Service
- ◆ Now learning within a new culture
  - ◆ Learning a new language
  - ◆ Learning a new culture
  - ◆ Learning new skills
    - Construction project
    - Physical therapy
    - Etc.
- ◆ Learning about an evolutionary community

## Marco Polo Return Phase

- ◆ Continue to learn meta-cognitive principles in the context of community service

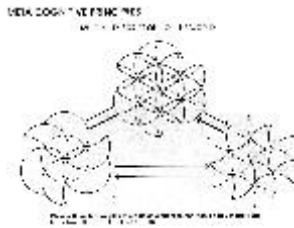
## Alternative Time Lines



Because this new course, “Diversity and Learning: A Global Perspective” is motivated by a theoretical perspective about how to achieve higher levels of learning, let me begin my description of the nature of the course by describing a few more aspects of the intellectual underpinnings of the course.

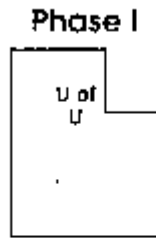
Learning III almost always occurs in a cultural or community context. Large social paradigm shifts such as the Renaissance or the Information Revolution are a product of collective thought. Thus the development of generative communities is an important process in setting up Learning III. Another, related, process that can lead to Learning III shifts might be called the “Marco Polo” effect. An individual or group brings together experiences from two diverse cultures triggering Level III changes in at least one of them.

This “Marco Polo” effect is an example of a general epistemological principle. Binocular vision provides a clear example of this. Our two eyes, being as they are a few inches apart, see the world slightly differently, giving us two slightly different maps of the territory; our eyes give a “double description” of the world around us. Our neurology is such that these two descriptions, one from each eye, are synthesized into a single, subjective picture. What emerges from synthesizing this double description is the experience of “depth perception.” When functioning normally, our neurology does not choose one eye’s description as “right” and reject the other eye’s description as “wrong.” Rather we hold the two descriptions simultaneously, and from comparing the differences between the two maps comes a new kind of knowledge not available to either eye alone—the direct knowledge of spatial depth.



Just as moving from monocular to binocular vision moves us from perceiving only two dimensions to perceiving three dimensions, experience in a second culture is one way of advancing from Learning II to Learning III. People originally learn to learn within the context of their primary culture. Like the water for fish, however, the principles behind this learning to learn are transparent and imperceptible. We don’t know how we learn to learn. When people move to a second culture the assumptions of that culture often force them to learn to learn in different ways than they did originally. In the right circumstances (circumstances I hope to create in this class), people can move to a higher level perspective that allows them to compare the methods of learning to learn in the two cultures. To learn the differences in learning to learn in the two cultures is by definition Learning III. Consequently, “cultural diversity” is the name of one context in which Learning III becomes possible. Cultural double descriptions are one way of moving beyond having a fish, beyond even learning to fish, toward the dream of creating a new way to feed yourself.

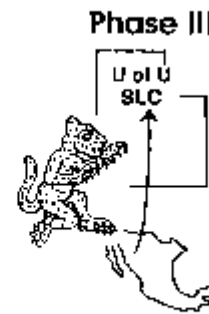
# CLASS OUTLINE



First part of class at U of U



Second part of class in Mexico



Third part of class in Salt Lake Community and U of U campus

## Meta-Cognitive Principles

- ◆ Levels of learning
- ◆ Multiple descriptions
  - ◆ Multi cultural viewpoints
- ◆ Action in the world
- ◆ Life-based epistemology
- ◆ Principles for creating your own theory of humanness in the context of the planet.
- ◆ Writing Intensive
  - ◆ 3 1-to-5 page papers per week

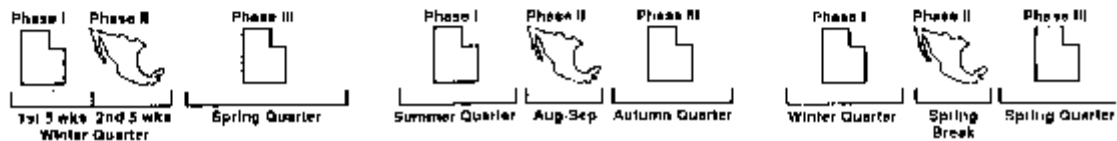
## Continuation of Learning Meta-Cognitive Principles in the Context of Meaningful Action in the World

- ◆ Service
- ◆ New learning within a new culture
  - ◆ Learning a new language
  - ◆ Learning a new culture
  - ◆ Learning new skills
    - Construction project
    - Physical therapy
    - Etc.
  - ◆ Learning about an evolutionary community

## Marco Polo Return Phase

- ◆ Continue to learn meta-cognitive principles in the context of community service

## Alternative Time Lines



## The Proposal: "Diversity and Learning: A Global Perspective"

I am proposing a two-quarter course for winter and spring quarters to take place next year. The first five weeks of the winter quarter would be devoted to academic study, the second five weeks would combine continued academic study with a field trip to perform community service in Mexico. The spring quarter course would combine further academic study with further community service, particularly in the Spanish-speaking community, in Salt Lake City.

The first five weeks of the first quarter will be carefully designed to maximize the possibility that the bicultural, Mexican experience will engender high level learning. This will be done by developing the type of community among students that facilitates Level III learning, and by setting up the precursors of Learning III. It is true that travel broadens, it is true that we often gain sudden "insight" into our own language and culture when we contact a second language and culture. These common observations are hints that high level learning does occur in such encounters. But, in my opinion, its occurrence is not assured. Consequently, I will teach students ways of approaching their experiences in Mexico—both

prior to and during their travel—that will facilitate high level learning.

The purpose of the second quarter is to bring further community coherence to student experiences by providing a context wherein students can take meaningful action which solidly relates their Mexican learning back to the Salt Lake community. They will, like Marco Polo, bring their new learning back to their own culture. The second quarter will also connect them to diversity in their own community so that their bicultural learning can continue.

I am applying for three quarters to initiate this project. During the Autumn quarter I will design the two courses and write a draft textbook for them. During the spring quarter, besides teaching the second quarter course, I want to rewrite the text and revise the course.

Perhaps it is useful to note why I am choosing a Mexican bicultural experience to set a context for triggering Learning III. There are many reasons. Certainly the Spanish-speaking community is one of the largest and fastest growing aspects of cultural diversity in the United States. Moreover, powerful social forces—a symptom of which is the possibility of a trade block made up of Canada, Mexico and the United States—are currently pulling various American cultures together. Responding to these issues, I have, on my own, taken a year of Spanish language courses at the University and have spent two months last summer living in Mexico with a family that did not speak English. Consequently, I am best prepared to accomplish this project in a Spanish-speaking culture. Even so, next summer, prior to course development, I want to spend time in Mexico, studying language and visiting Project Projimo which is described below.

I hope to teach this class many times in the future (perhaps in the Summer and Autumn quarters for logistical reasons). Consequently I am considering a range of options for specific places to go in Mexico and specific kinds of experiences to set up for the students. However, for the first teaching of these courses, I have developed a plan in conjunction with the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center to visit a village in western Mexico and participate in Project Projimo. This is a community-based program to rehabilitate disabled children and young people from rural Mexico. (The Bennion Center assures me that there is a pool of students eager to combine community service in Mexico with rigorous academic learning to put that service experience into perspective). The services provided by Project Projimo include medical and nursing care, physical therapy, skills training, and counseling. The Projimo team also makes low-tech wheel chairs and other aids. This project is essentially a people's self-help effort to take care of their own. Project Projimo is willing to provide volunteers from the United States with low cost room and board as well as language training. Thus students would, besides the academic class I would offer each day, be provided with language training; furthermore, they would deepen their knowledge of how community functions through their experiences as they join the community of a small Mexican mountain village.

Returning to Ivan in Piskarevskoye Cemetery, returning to Ivan's question, returning,

more importantly, to the fact that my interaction with Ivan was a pivotal moment that changed the course of my life, I notice, as have others, that this experience came amidst a bicultural encounter. One of my answers to Ivan, the one I offer as an educator is that my “dream, vision.... from, of.... for... mode of living... together” is to provide the context and framework for students to experience such pivotal moments for themselves, moments which illuminate the path to the kinds of profound learning they seek, moments which trigger the deep changes they choose to make.

Before I give one kind of answer, I want to thank you for considering me as a candidate for the University Professorship in 1992-93. The vitality of undergraduate education on campus is stimulated by Liberal Education’s encouragement of faculty to initiate teaching innovations. In as much as the University Professorship is the centerpiece of this continuous revitalization, it would give me great honor to serve in this position.