

## CONVERSATION GUIDE

Created by Muriel I. Elmer, Duane H. Elmer and Rhonda M. McEwen to accompany *The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences*

### INTRODUCTION

The goal of this Conversation Guide is for you to engage the key topics of the Learning Cycle individually or in a group. Your experience with it is the best way to learn how to teach it to others to help them make their own life changes. Our prayer is that you will use this process regularly in your own life and help many others do it through your teaching.

### 1. LAYING THE FOUNDATION

- From your experience with formal education, do you agree with Parker Palmer's critique (p. 6)? Explain.
- The Learning Cycle is summarized on page 7. It shows the movement of information from cognition (knowing at the mental level) all the way through to building habitual Christlike behaviors. Why is behavior change so important?
- You have read the objectives for this text. Now reflect on your own reasons for reading—your objectives. As you consider your teaching ministry context (whether formal, nonformal, or even informal), what is one thing you would like to do better?

### 2. WEAVING TRUTH AND LIFE

- What does it mean to weave truth and life?
- Do you agree that there is some hypocrisy in all of us? Explain. Why is it *insufficient* to simply *know* the truth? How do we discover the hypocrite within ourselves? How do we deal with it?

### 3. RECALL, REHEARSAL, AND RETENTION

- Imagine you have remembered something *important* for a reasonably long time . . . maybe for your lifetime (other than in rote memory)? Explain how that happened.
- Explain or summarize how the chapter connects **recall** (knowing something), **rehearsal** (explaining it in your own words), and **retention** (remembering it). Can you connect your answer to this question with the answer you gave to the first question?
- Think of a teaching or facilitation situation where you would like to get across important content—whether in your home, church, or wherever God has placed you. How could you ensure both meaning and relevance? What might be a strategy you could use?

### 4. LECTURES THAT TRANSFORM

- Research shows that straight lecturing probably does not lead to long term retention or behavior change. Look at the list of “Best Lectures” items (pp. 39-51). Are there two of these suggestions that may help you increase retention if you were to build them into your presentations (Bible study, sermons, classrooms, family devotions, youth ministry, etc.?)
- Are there items on the list that you have found personally unhelpful? Why do you think they were unhelpful? Are there some you have tried and they simply didn’t work? Speculate about why they did not work.
- Consider an upcoming lecture, sermon, or talk which you plan to deliver. After reading this chapter, identify one strategy you will use to increase greater connection for the hearers. Or consider a lecture or talk you have heard this past week. Draft a question that invites you to consider implications and write a response. Reflect on your engagement with the content during this exercise. What did you notice?

### 5. THE ROLE OF EMOTION IN LEARNING

- Outline the steps that brought you to your current (or anticipated) ministry context. What were the series of circumstances that drew you to your chosen vocation?

- Reflect on your answer to the first question. Were most of those circumstances positive in nature? Explain. How did these situations noted in the first question influence your interest in knowing more about your vocation?
- In your ministry situations, what do you do to build positive affect or feeling in your group—whether family time, formal Bible study, Sunday School class, sermon, or community group? What else might you do to build positive affect?

## **6. FROM CONTENT TO EXPERIENCE**

- How does the concept of speculation connect with learning? Why is it so essential to the learning process? Yet, why is it often overlooked?
- On page 83 the authors state, “Truth is barren when not connected with life experience.” Identify at least three Scripture passages which exemplify this statement. What additional insights do these passages offer as you consider the learning process?
- What might Ephesians 6:12 have to do with learning? Yet, what are the resources God gives us? (cf. Eph 6:10, 13-18) What other resources has he given us in the Scriptures?

## **7. THE POWER OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE**

- Describe a time when God did not do what you wanted or were expecting—or when he simply took you in a different direction. How was it for you? What did you learn? “Dissonance, difficult as it may be, is one way God grows us” (p. 91). Has this been your experience? Explain.
- The chapter suggests that much of Jesus’ teaching brought cognitive dissonance to his hearers. Why did he do this? What outcome was he hoping for? How did the various groups respond to these situations?
- What is the most important “take away” from this chapter for you?

## **8. IDENTIFYING BARRIERS**

- Think about a time when you tried to change a behavior and were successful. What were the factors that helped you achieve that success?

- Consider another time when you tried but were unable to change. What factors hindered your success? How do these compare with the five beliefs noted on page 113?
- How might the identification of barriers assist in the process of Christian nurture?

## 9. OVERCOMING BARRIERS

- Imagine you are in a Bible study group studying James 1:5-7. James writes about what to do when we face trials. Write a *Memo to Myself* (described in pp. 31-32, 120) to think through a personal trial in light of this Scripture. Share your *Memo to Myself* in your group.
- Accountability relationships often help people make difficult behavior changes. If you were leading a Bible study group, what steps would you take to ensure the safety needed to facilitate accountability relationships within the group?
- Read the “Learning Task Summary” at the end of the chapter (pp. 125-126). In your experience with small group groups, which one or two of these tasks are most often omitted? Why do you think they tend to be omitted?

## 10. TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

- Review the four stages of transformative learning from pages 136-139: (1) disorienting dilemma, (2) critical assessment of assumptions, (3) discourse and dialogue with others, and (4) taking action to integrate the new perspective. Recall a deep change that you have experienced in your own life. How and in what ways did it reflect these steps? Where did it differ?
- Review the six “contributing conditions to transformative learning” outlined on pages 140-141. As a teacher or facilitator within your own ministry context, identify one way you could promote these conditions for your participants. Be specific.
- Reflect on the key insights you have gleaned from this chapter. What do you see as the three most essential factors which contribute to learning that is transformative?

## 11. LEARNING TASKS LEADING TO PRACTICE

- This chapter asserts that the chief role of education is to help learners facilitate connections to practice. Review the various ways the authors suggest putting learning into practice and select one that works best for your situation. How might you implement it?
- When learners are practicing a new skill in a group, what do you think are two important elements of a good feedback (evaluation) session? Why?
- In your experience, do Bible study leaders tend to follow up on members' decisions to make a life change or not? Explain why or why not.

## 12. BUILDING A HABIT

- Think about one of your well-established daily habits. What is the cue (trigger, prompt) that initiates it, the routine (set of behaviors) you follow, and finally, the reward you experience once completed?
- Now think about one of your habits you consider to be bad or unproductive. Can you identify the cue, routine, and reward for that habit? How might you use the same well-established cue and perhaps the reward to change that habit into a good one?
- Given the fact that our behavior tends to betray our beliefs, in your own ministry context (e.g., Bible study leader), what could you do to help participants more fully align their habits with the beliefs they espouse?

## 13. SUSTAINING A HABIT

- The Smith quote on page 185 underscores the power of habit that the authors have described in the last few chapters. Identify a specific implication of this concept for your own context.
- Have you ever been part of a group which actively supported life changes you were hoping to make? What did the group do to encourage your growth? If not, what would it take to create a group where that was the case?
- Read the Teacher's Role Summary at the end of the chapter. Give one or two suggestions that would be important to incorporate in your ministry? Why did you choose those?

#### 14. FROM HABIT TO CHARACTER

The following core questions are designed to engage learners to proceed from their first encounter with the truth, to the formation of life habits leading to Christlike character. To put this into practice, prayerfully reflect on one behavior you can work on that will lead you to greater Christlikeness. Now answer the questions below as a reminder and guide to do it.

- What is God's Holy Spirit saying to you about some obedience to his truth? Name it. (Remember the truth)
- Why is this truth important in your life? (Value the truth)
- What is God telling you to do? (Ponder what to do with the truth)
- What could keep you from doing it? (Identify barriers to doing the truth)
- What are some first steps you need to take? (Begin changing my behavior)
- What will remind you to do it consistently? (Form a habit based on the truth)
- How will this new habit of obedience develop your character? Who else will be affected by this change? In what way(s)?

We join you in the pursuit of obedience to God's Word for his glory.