Taking Charge®

**Working in *Partnership* with *Learners* of <u>All</u> Abilities to
Empower Them to Take Charge of Their Own Learning and Lives**

Nancy J. Lavelle, Ph.D.
South Pasadena, California
October, 2019

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Abstract

The goal of Taking Charge® is to empower <u>all</u> *learners* to experience themselves as whole, able, and complete just the way they are, and just the way they are not; able and capable of making effective choices and taking personal responsibility for their *learning breakdowns* and learning successes in life.

A basic premise of the Taking Charge® approach is that it is not an event itself, but it is our interpretation of the event that closes or opens possibilities for learning and effective, *coordinated action* to occur. Simply put, we have two possibilities: (1) to react (i.e., close possibilities for learning) or (2) to *choose* to *observe* and take effective, *coordinated action* (i.e., open possibilities for learning). The question then arises, when "something happens in our world," what stops us from being an *observer*, able to *choose* to take effective, *coordinated action*, to learn versus being reactive and ineffective in our <u>actions</u>? How can we turn *learning breakdowns* into learning opportunities? To address these questions, we explore three *linguistic distinctions* that focus on how we "take action" in the world: the *underlying commitments* in our speaking and listening (i.e., our *Speech Acts*); language, observation, and <u>action</u>; and our *underlying backgrounds of interpretation*, our *Self-Narratives.*

We describe *Linguistic Coaching®* as a conversation that allows the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* to *observe* how the *underlying commitments* in our speaking and *listening,* our *Speech Acts* (i.e., promises, offers, requests, and assertions) close or open possibilities for learning and effective, *coordinated action.* By *observing* the "stories" we tell ourselves about ourselves (i.e., our *Self-Narratives*), the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* begin to see how the language we use (i.e., our *underlying backgrounds of interpretation*) determines the nature of our thoughts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, feelings, and sensations, and the subsequent <u>action</u> we take, and not the other way around.

Moreover, we show how the reactive, automatic, and dependent relationship between our *Public and Private Self-Narratives* traps us in a *Vicious Circle* where we make *ungrounded* versus *grounded* assessments of our own competence. Coupled with our own individual *barriers to learning*, the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* prevents us from seeing ourselves as *learners*, able and capable of developing competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*. In contrast, the *Learner Self-Narrativ*e presents a new domain of <u>action</u>, one in which we *observe* ourselves as *learners, whole, able and complete, just the way we are and just the way we are not*. In a context of mutual learning, mutual trust, and mutual respect, the *Linguistic Coach* acts as a mirror reflecting back to the *learner* that he or she is capable and able to develop competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*. With the support of the *Linguistic Coach*, the *learner* moves through *Levels of Learning Competence* in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*, experiencing that he or she has the capacity to make *choices*, and is *personally responsible* for his or her own learning process.

By working in p*artnership* with the *learner,* as mutual *observers*, to establish an *ecology* for learning, the *Linguistic Coach* moves away from being a disciplinarian or behavior change manager to someone who

empowers the *learner* to be actively engaged in his or her own learning process. Through *Dialogues for Action*, the *Linguistic Coac*h works in *partnership* with *learners* to prevent *learning breakdowns*, and turn *learning breakdowns* into opportunities for mutual learning and effective, *coordinated action*. To engage *learners* in an effective *dialogue* process (i.e., *Dialogues for Action*), the *Linguistic Coach* shifts his or her own *ontology* from one that closes possibilities for learning to one that opens possibilities for learning. *Learners* are then empowered to "take charge" of their own learning process, opening possibilities for them to <u>act</u> effectively in the world as competent, caring, and contributing members of society.

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<u>**Taking Charge®**</u>

The goal of Taking Charge**®** is to empower <u>all</u> *learners* to experience themselves as whole, able, and complete just the way they are, and just the way they are not; able and capable of making effective choices and taking personal responsibility for their *learning breakdowns* and learning successes in life. Through *Linguistic Coaching*® conversations, *learners* identify areas of life concerns; develop competencies and strategies to handle those concerns; and learn to follow through with effective, *coordinated action* that is conducive to the well-being of the *learner* as well as others. *Learners* are, then, empowered to "take charge" of their own learning process, opening possibilities for them to <u>act</u> effectively in the world as competent, caring, and contributing members of society.

<u>*Linguistic Coaching*®</u>

Linguistic Coaching® is a conversation in situations of shared activity that allows the speaker and *listener* to work in *partnership* as *observers. Linguistic Coaching*® is embedded in the everyday conversations we have with other *learners* that allow us to *listen* to what is said and what is not said by *learners* and ourselves; derive meaning; and "take action" in the world.

In a *Linguistic Coaching*® conversation, *listening* constitutes more than the commonplace definition of the word. For example, "active listening" is a communication system used in counseling, training, and conflict resolution. It requires the listener to fully concentrate, understand, respond and then remember what is being said. "Reflective listening" is where the listener repeats back to the speaker what they have just heard to confirm understanding of both parties. In contrast, in *Linguistic Coaching*®, *listening* refers to our pervasive, fundamental, and underlying backgrounds of interpretation (i.e., our *Self-Narratives*) the largely unrecognized beliefs, feelings, expectations, and assumptions that we have obtained through our family, ethnicity, gender role, gender identity, life experiences, educational background, religious upbringing, etc. When we *listen* to ourselves and others, we *listen* through the filter of our underlying background of interpretation and we don't even notice it. As an example, when we *observe* a bowl of tropical fish, we see many things: water, brightly colored fish, an air pump, ceramic "castles", the bowl itself, etc. However, the fish, presumably, see everything through a filter of water. The fish are limited in their ability to interpret the bowl they live in and the environment outside the bowl. From outside the fish bowl, we can *observe* the limitations of the fish, but for the fish, life inside a fish bowl is just the way it is. We *listen* to ourselves and others through our own unique filters, our unrecognized, underlying backgrounds of interpretation. It is little understood that our underlying backgrounds of interpretation both close and open possibilities for taking effective, *coordinated action*.

Listening also refers to the underlying commitments in the speaking and *listening* of ourselves and others. Taking effective, *coordinated action* in the world is directly related to our ability to *listen* to, that is *observe*, the underlying patterns of commitment in *Speech Acts* (i.e., requests, offers, promises,

assertions) of ourselves and others. Consequently, the role of the *Linguistic Coach* differs from that of a typical coach or even a teacher, mentor, counselor, or therapist in that the focus is on *listening* to the underlying backgrounds of interpretation (i.e., *Self-Narratives*) and the underlying commitments in speaking and *listening* (i.e., *Speech Acts)* that form the basis for the conversations we have with *learners*, others, and ourselves.

Our underlying backgrounds of interpretation show up in our *Self-Narratives*, the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, others, and the world. By *listening* to *learners'* (and our own) *Self-Narratives*, we can *observe* whether or not, their underlying backgrounds of interpretation close or open possibilities for them to take effective, *coordinated action* (see *Domains of Being*: Our *Self-Narratives* and <u>Action</u> below). Through a process of mutual learning, trust and respect, the *Linguistic Coach* can empower *learners* to *observe* the commitment in their own speaking and *listening* and the commitment in the speaking and *listening* of others (i.e., *Speech Acts*).

Listening also refers to the *linguistic distinctions* we make in our everyday conversations with others. Taking Charge® defines a *linguistic distinction* as a conversation between the *Linguistic Coach* and other *observers* that assesses the units, nature, structure, and meaning of the <u>action</u> we take. For example, an *observer, listening* to someone yell, assesses the units, nature, structure, and meaning of the yell. Is it a short or long yell? Is it a weak or strong yell? Is it a high-pitched or a low-pitched yell? Is it a cry for help? Is it a warning? Is someone hurt? Is someone angry or scared? *Linguistic distinctions* arise out of our assumptions (i.e., our underlying backgrounds of interpretation) and can be *grounded* or *ungrounded*, that is, verifiable or not. As *Linguistic Coaches*, we engage in consensual conversations with other *observers* that allow us to determine whether our own and others *linguistic distinctions* are *grounded* or *ungrounded*.

Linguistic Coaching® empowers the *Linguistic Coach* and *learners* to work in *partnership* as *observers* to:

- operate as if external to the sets of assumptions and circumstances in which they find themselves;
- make clear the sets of assumptions that have been unclear in the language they use about themselves and others (i.e., their *Self-Narratives*);
- *observe* the underlying commitments in the speaking and *listening* of themselves and others (i.e., their *Speech Acts*);
- determine whether their *linguistic distinctions*, that is, their <u>assessments</u> of the <u>*action*</u> they take are verifiable or not; and *coordinate* effective *action*.

<u>Something Happens in Our/My World</u>

A basic premise of the Taking Charge® approach is that it is not an event itself, but it is our interpretation of the event that closes or opens possibilities for learning and effective, *coordinated action* to occur. Our thoughts, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, feelings, and sensations all stem from our underlying background of interpretation. This *linguistic distinctio*n is not new. Born a slave, Epictetus (AD 135), a Greek-speaking Stoic philosopher, taught that "Not things, but opinions about things, trouble men…in the power of *choice* alone we may achieve peace of mind." Simply put, when something

happens in our world, there are two possibilities: (1) to react (i.e., close possibilities for learning); or (2) to *choose* to *observe* and take effective, *coordinated action* (i.e., open possibilities for learning).

In a *Linguistic Coaching®* conversation, we can begin to distinguish whether or not our response to "something happening in our world" is reactive and whether or not we have *chosen* to be an *observer*, opening possibilities for learning and effective, *coordinated action*. In a *Linguistic Coaching®* conversation, we can also *choose* to turn our *reaction* to "something happening" into a positive learning opportunity for ourselves and others (see *Dialogues for Action* below).

"Something happening in our world" can be a routine event (such as brushing our teeth in the mornings) or something unexpected (such as getting into a car accident in a parking lot). However, it may not be obvious that becoming an *observer* of both routine and unexpected events in our lives can either close or open possibilities for learning to occur. *Observing* how we routinely brush our teeth in the morning can lead to more effective teeth brushing. On the other hand, having the electric toothbrush unexpectedly stop working may be an excuse to get upset or become a problem-solving opportunity (i.e., deciding to temporarily use a manual toothbrush). Likewise, getting into an unexpected car accident in a parking lot may lead to a yelling match (even if we are only yelling at ourselves) or teach us to drive more slowly or look more carefully before backing up the car.

Unfortunately, the term "reactive" has not only developed a negative connotation, it takes us away from *observing* that we can *choose* to turn our reactions into learning opportunities. Therefore, making the distinction between learning (i.e., *coordinated action*) and *learning breakdowns* (i.e., action that is not coordinated, therefore reactive) is useful. Viewing *learning breakdowns* as opportunities for learning to occur is a critical *linguistic distinction*, an actual *choice* that we can make. Consequently, *a learning breakdown* is not something to be characterized as inherently positive or negative or something to be avoided. In fact, the Ancient Greek translation for the word *crisis* means turning point, a change for the worse or for the better. Similarly, something happening in our world can become a *learning breakdown* or a learning opportunity.

Learning Breakdowns

Learning breakdowns are breaks in effective, *coordinated action*; not "dancing" with oneself or others. Using the metaphor of "dancing" to describe *coordinated action* is purposeful. Much like ballroom dancers, Taking Charge® empowers us to "learn", that is, work in *partnership* with others to *listen* to (i.e., *observe*) our own and others underlying backgrounds of interpretation (i.e., *Self-Narratives*) and our own and others underlying commitments in speaking and listening (i.e., *Speech Acts*). In that way, the *Linguistic Coach* and *learners* "dance" together to turn *learning breakdowns* into learning opportunities (i.e., *coordinated action*). How we talk about the world, our *Self-Narratives*, emerge in reoccurring patterns of *learning breakdowns* and the resultant feedback from another speaker or *listener*. Engaging in a *Linguistic Coaching®* conversation as *observers*, the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* can identify the source of the *learning breakdown* and the subsequent *Speech Acts* or courses of action that will allow the *Linguistic Co*ach and *learner* to act effectively in *coordinating action*, that is, resolving the *learning breakdown* (see Chart A: Sources of *Learning Breakdowns* below).

Chart A
Sources of *Learning Breakdowns*

***Learner* Communication Breakdowns**	• Divergent assumptions (i.e. backgrounds of interpretation) that show up as broken promises; unfulfilled expectations; thwarted intentions; undelivered communications, etc. • Underlying commitment or lack of commitment in *Speech Acts* that show up as ungrounded or ineffective assertions; offers; requests; and promises. • Unidentified or unaddressed *Learner Life Concerns*, either immediate or long term. • Ungrounded assessments of *Learner's Levels of Learning Competence*. • Negative or ungrounded verbal or non-verbal assessments of *learners* in front of them or others.
***Learner* *Self-Narrative* Breakdowns**	• Ungrounded Public Self-Narratives used to manipulate, control, or dominate others in order to defend and protect our Private Self-Narratives. • Being trapped in the Vicious Circle Self-Narrative's mood of despair and resignation. • Barriers to learning that we assess stop us from seeing ourselves as learners, whole, able and complete: my label (disabled, autistic, etc.); my poverty level; my not having breakfast; my being ill; my being on probation, etc.
***Learner* Task/Activity Breakdowns**	• Task/activity does not match *Learner's Learning Styles/Preferences*. • Task/activity does not match *Learner's Level of Learning Competence*. • Tasks/activities that address learner's Life Concerns are not included in *learner's* individual daily routines. • Task/activity is too easy or too difficult, too long or too short for the learner. • Task/activity is not analyzed and broken down into manageable steps for learner success. • Task/activity is not presented with clear instructions. • Materials that *learner* needs to complete the task/activity are not available/accessible to *learner*.
***Learner* Learning Ecology Breakdowns**	• Ineffective pre-planning for *learner* purposeful movement, "transition" times. • Unsupervised purposeful movement and/or transitions within and outside the class, therapeutic milieu, home, others homes, the community, etc. • Ineffective scheduling of tasks/activities; self-care routines; family and peer activities; leisure activities, etc. • Ineffective planning for changes in routines and/or unexpected changes in routines. • Ineffective planning for seating, room arrangement, and housekeeping to meet *learner* competence levels.

Our contention is that *learning breakdowns* actually facilitate the learning process and serve various functions by empowering the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* to: 1). *observe* their own and others underlying backgrounds of interpretation (i.e., *Self-Narratives*); 2). *observe* their own and others

underlying commitments in speaking and *listening* (i.e., *Speech Acts*)*; 3).* identify divergent assumptions that lead to *learning breakdowns*; and 4). gain competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*

Observing Our Underlying Backgrounds of Interpretation (i.e., Self-Narratives). Firstly, a *learning breakdown* is an opportunity to become a better *observer* of our underlying backgrounds of interpretation, our *Self-Narratives*. In fact, during reoccurring *learning breakdowns*, the *Linguistic Coach* and the *learner* begin to *observe* the pervasive, automatic, and ongoing conversations we have about ourselves and our world in which we make *grounded* or *ungrounded* assessments about our competence and the competence of others in *Domains of Life Concerns*. We can actually *observe* the relationship between our *Self-Narratives* and the effectiveness of the <u>action</u> we take in the world and discover that our *Self-Narratives* are the basis for future effective, *coordinated action*. In that way, we can *observe* how *learners' Self-Narratives* have a direct relationship to whether or not learning possibilities are closed or opened for *learners and others*.

Observing the Underlying Commitments in Speaking and Listening (i.e., Speech Acts). Secondly, during a *learning breakdown*, the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* engage in a *Linguistic Coaching®* conversation that enables them to discover the underlying commitments (or lack of commitments) in their own speaking and *listening* (i.e., *Speech Acts* including promises, offers, requests, assertions) and the speaking and *listening* of others. As example, young *learners* often have the uncanny ability to discern whether or not someone is genuine and authentic (i.e., committed) in their speaking and *listening*. A *Linguistic Coaching®* conversation allows the *Linguistic Coach* and *learners* to clarify the underlying commitments in their speaking and *listening* and, thus, a mutual learning opportunity (i.e., *coordinated action*) is created (see *Dialogues for Action* below).

Identifying Divergent Assumptions. Thirdly, during a *Linguistic Coaching®* conversation, the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* have an opportunity to identify the divergent assumptions present in the speaker's and *listener*'s underlying backgrounds of interpretation that can be the source of *learning breakdowns*. These may include broken promises, thwarted intentions, undelivered communications, unfulfilled expectations, etc. Whether or not a promise was made and broken; an intention was unrecognized or misunderstood; a communication was withheld out of frustration or some concern; or an expectation was or was not realistic, by engaging in a *Linguistic Coaching®* conversation, the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* can come to mutual *agreements* concerning future promises, intentions, communication, and expectations. Thus, out of *learning breakdowns*, mutual learning and effective, *coordinated action* can occur (see *Dialogues for Action* below).

Gaining Competence in Self-Identified Domains of Life Concerns. Lastly, *learning breakdowns* are actually necessary for gaining competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*. For example, when we take the time to *observe* how we brush our teeth, it can be considered a break in something that we have previously learned to do, or a *learning breakdown*. However, it is also a necessary step in learning to brush our teeth more effectively (i.e., gaining competence by observing that we brush horizontally when we should be brushing up and down). Similarly, it may be that the only time we recognize we need to drive more slowly in a parking lot is when we get into a car accident. Although the accident itself can be assessed as a negative, there is also a positive outcome…the opportunity to learn (once and for all) to

drive more slowly in a parking lot; or the opportunity to gain competence in driving safely (see *Learners' Domains of Life Concerns* below).

The question then arises, when "something happens in our world," what stops us from being an *observer*, able to choose to take effective, *coordinated action*, to learn versus being reactive and ineffective in our actions? How can we turn *learning breakdowns* into learning opportunities? To address these questions, we will explore three *linguistic distinctions* that focus on how we "take action" in the world: the underlying commitments in our speaking and *listening* (i.e., *Speech Acts*); language, observation, and action; and our underlying backgrounds of interpretation (i.e., our *Self-Narratives*).

Commitments in Speaking and Listening: *Speech Acts*

Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) formalized the analysis of language as meaningful acts by speakers and *listeners* in situations of shared activity. The essential importance of this analysis is to increase our ability to *listen* to the patterns of commitment in *Speech Acts* (i.e., assertions, offers, requests, and promises) entered into by the speaker and *listeners* when they take part in a conversation. *Listening* constitutes more than the commonplace definition of the word. *Listening* in this context refers to our pervasive and fundamental underlying backgrounds of interpretation, our *Self-Narratives*, that presupposes some kind of social interaction. It is the basic orientation that allows us to *listen* to what is spoken and what is not spoken and derive meaning. It is out of our *listening* to ourselves and others that we generate future action.

Their analysis of language makes clear the underlying assumptions (i.e., underlying backgrounds of interpretation) and the possibilities for what the speaker can do with an utterance. *Assertions* commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something being the case – to the truth of the expressed proposition (i.e., the sky is blue). One type of assertion is an assessment of our own competence which can be *grounded* or *ungrounded*, that is, verifiable or not (see the discussion of the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* below). *Offers* commit the speaker to carry out some *linguistic* act. An offer may be in the form of a question, "Can I help?" or a declaration, as in, "I'll help you!" Learning to distinguish the commitment in someone's offer is a powerful tool for forwarding effective action (i.e., "Let's meet for dinner sometime." versus "Let's meet for dinner tomorrow night at 6:00 p.m. at Burger King."). *Requests* are attempts to get the *listener* to do something, to carry out some linguistic act. "Do you know where my pencil is?" may also be a request for help. Likewise, "I need a new pencil!" sounds like a demand but could also be rephrased to determine whether or not a request is being made, as in "Are you asking for a new pencil?" Many people lack experience making requests, particularly in regard to their concerns in life. Our requests are often masked by complaints, demands, arguments, accusations, or even temper tantrums. In those cases, it is often helpful to ask, "Do you have a request of me, or of someone else?" *Promises* commit the speaker to some future course of action. A promise can be a simple statement, as in, "I'll be there." Promises are also implied, "As a teacher, I am promising, whether or not I have stated it formally, to be prepared to assist you as a student to learn". A particular type of promise is called an *agreement*. *Agreements* are mutually-determined promises (assumptions and expectations) that govern a conversation. *Agreements* differ from rules imposed by one person on another. Rather, both the speaker and *listener* participate in the creation of an *agreement*.

Language, Observation, and Action

A basic premise of the Taking Charge® approach is that the language we use determines the nature of our thoughts, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, feelings, and sensations, and the subsequent <u>action</u> we take, not the other way around. For example, one person may describe the sensation he experiences in his body during and after riding a roller coaster as thrilling, another as scary, and still another as nauseating. Similarly, we often assume that as human beings we struggle to put our thoughts into words so that we can express our "true feelings." We fail to recognize that in making the *linguistic distinction* that a particular sensation is thrilling versus scary or nauseating, we are actually *"language-ing"* that sensation and accompanying feeling into being. We are not arguing that people do not have a right to interpret their experience of riding a roller coaster in any way that they want. Rather, we are pointing out the relationship between the *linguistic distinctions* we use, our sensations and feelings, and the subsequent <u>action</u> that we take (i.e., "The roller coaster was scary (nauseating). I'm never riding a roller coaster again!").

There is, also, another way of observing the relationship between the *linguistic distinctions* we make and the <u>action</u> we take. We often think of our eyes using the image of a camera. From "inside our heads" we look out at the world and take "objective" pictures of the world that we see outside our bodies. However, in Taking Charge®, we contend that our eyes actually function as projectors. Our eyes derive meaning from the world through interpretation. It is language that actually allows us to determine that we are looking at a tree versus a flagpole. It is through a *linguistic distinction* that we determine whether someone is smiling at us or scowling at us. Thus, in this scenario, our eyes are only as acute or effective as is our ability to interpret our world through *linguistic distinctions*. We might even say that we "see" through our ears, not through our eyes.

A common example of the relationship between our underlying backgrounds of interpretation, the *linguistic distinctions* we make, what we "see" in the world, and the subsequent <u>action</u> we take is that of the Inuit. Apparently, the Inuit have over a hundred words, or *linguistic distinctions*, to describe various types of snow. Their survival depends upon their ability to recognize and interpret a wide range of snow conditions. In contrast, someone born and raised in Southern California might struggle to name even a few words to use for different snow conditions (i.e., sleet, icy, slushy, powder). Even if he were standing beside an Inuit, "seeing" the same snow conditions, we may wonder whether someone from Southern California could actually "see" the same thing that someone raised in the Arctic "sees." Again, we would argue that our underlying backgrounds of interpretation, or the *linguistic distinctions* that we make, determine the nature of our thoughts, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, feelings, and sensations, and the subsequent <u>action</u> that we take. Clearly, someone from Southern California will have a different underlying background of interpretation about the snow conditions in the Arctic and take different <u>action</u> based on those *linguistic distinctions* than someone born and raised in the Arctic. As we gain the ability to operate as an *observer,* external to our underlying backgrounds of interpretation (i.e. Self-Narratives), we open new possibilities for effective, *coordinated action*.

*Domains of Being***: Our *Self-Narratives* and Action**

We have found it useful to describe three *Domains of Being* out of which we "take action" in the world. These domains of <u>action</u> are our *Public Self-Narrative*, what we present to the world; our *Private Self-Narrative*, who we are afraid we are; and our *Learner Self-Narrative*, who we really are (see Diagram A: *Domains of Being*—Our *Self-Narratives* and <u>Action</u> below). We distinguish these domains of <u>action</u> as a way to assist the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* in observing the multidimensional underlying backgrounds of interpretations that they make about themselves and others, and the subsequent <u>action</u> they take. Also, by framing these domains as <u>action</u>, or *linguistic distinctions*, we allow for the exploration of a different set of possibilities for future <u>action</u>, one that moves us away from being managers of others' behavior, or disciplinarians, or even counselors, to being *partners* that work together to *observe* our own and others' *Self-Narratives*, which close or open or possibilities for future effective, *coordinated action*.

<u>Diagram A</u>
**Three Domains of Being:
Our Self-Narratives and Action**
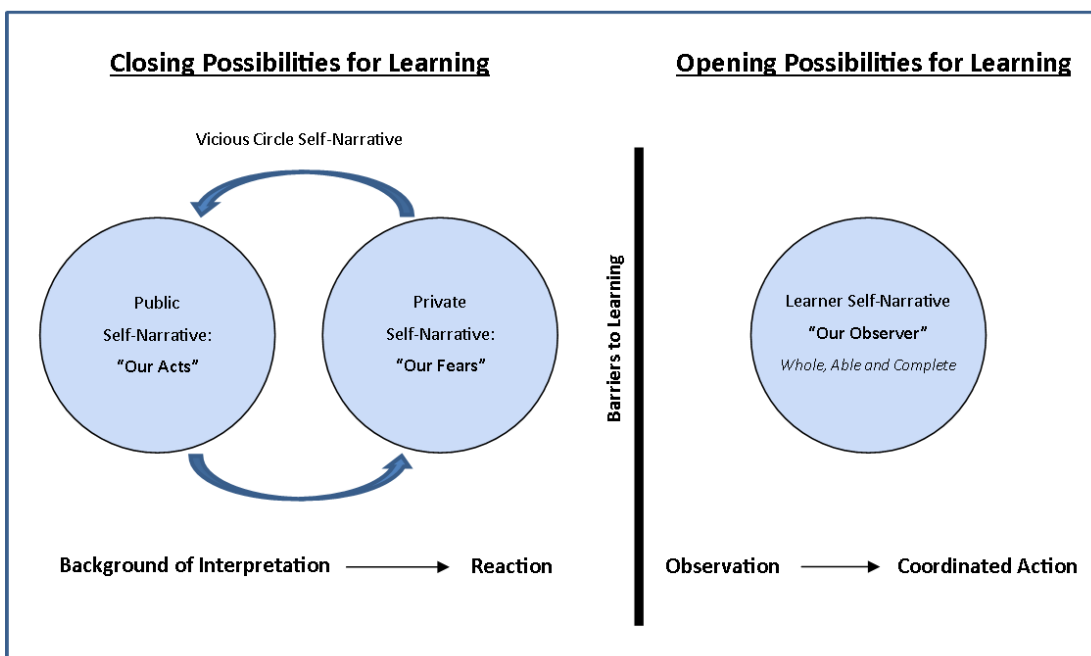
Our *Public Self-Narrative*

The first domain of <u>action</u>, our *Public Self-Narrative*, is essentially "what we present to the world." It can also be characterized as our "act", our personality, or our public identity. Observing the <u>actions</u> that someone presents to the world is an opportunity to begin to *observe* the story that each person tells about themselves, their *Self-Narrative*. In our *Public Self-Narrative*, our <u>actions</u> might show up as "I am

cool, tough, strong, a victim, a bully, a "good" person, a nerd, "popular," the class clown, a know-it-all, etc." For the most part, we are unaware that we are making any particular *linguistic* statement with our <u>actions</u>. Our <u>actions</u> in this domain are automatic and reactive. Obviously, an assessment of our *Public Self-Narrative* can be considered positive or negative. Being "a strong person" may be considered a positive. Being a "bully" is almost always considered a negative. When one person makes a negative assessment about another person's *Public Self-Narrative*, that *Public Self-Narrative* might be characterized as a "behavior problem."

Labeling these negative assessments as *behaviors*, however, masks the *linguistic* nature of <u>action</u>. Seen as behaviors, professionals or parents go about trying to change or modify the behavior problem. Our approach is to recognize that a *linguistic distinction* is being made about that individual's underlying background of interpretation, his or her *Public Self-Narrative*, that both closes and opens possibilities for learning and future effective, *coordinated action* for themselves and others.

We see two important limitations in viewing <u>action</u> as behavior rather than as language. First, focusing on behavior either ignores the relationship between our underlying backgrounds of interpretation and the subsequent <u>action </u>we take, or relegates language entirely to a mental phenomenon, as in such approaches as cognitive behavior modification. From our point of view, language is a biological phenomenon (Maturana & Varela, 1992). Language is not isolated to the mind and the speaking and listening apparatus. As biological entities, we are born into a world of language. You might say that language lives in our bodies, not in our minds. Modifications to our underlying backgrounds of interpretations also require modifications of our bodies. We operate in a complex interplay with our environment and with others that can be likened to a *linguistic* "dance". Thus, the very notion of trying to modify someone's behavior becomes antithetical to our approach. Rather, we advocate an *ecological* approach to learning, which is described below (see Creating an *Ecology* for Learning).

The second difficulty lies in the notion that changing someone's "act," or their *Public Self-Narrative* that is presented to the world, will effectively change someone's behavior. For all of us, our "acts" are only a cover for who we are afraid we are. Changing our *Public Self-Narrative* may not change the private, underlying background of interpretation we have of ourselves, our *Private Self-Narrative*.

Our *Private Self-Narrative*

While it may be easy to recognize the fear in the <u>actions</u> of a timid, anxious, withdrawn individual, it is not always readily apparent that the <u>actions</u> of a hostile, belligerent "bully" are also covering up the fear of who they are afraid they are. In our *Private Self-Narrative*, the fear about who we are afraid we are shows up in the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, *linguistic* statements such as, "I am unloved; weird; stupid; weak; unattractive; undeserving; hopeless; a failure; unworthy; unlovable, etc." However, for most individuals, these fears remain a private, unrecognized, and unvoiced *Private Self-Narrative*. When these *linguistic* statements are voiced, we may assess the individual as a "victim" or in need of some type of treatment designed to alleviate their fears. As parents/caregivers or professionals, we may also feel helpless in the face of their obvious despair or suffering.

However, the critical point is to recognize the automatic, "reactive," and dependent relationship between our *Private Self-Narrative* and our *Public Self-Narrative*. The primary function and purpose of our "acts," our *Public Self-Narrative*, is to manipulate, dominate, and control others in order to defend and protect our *Private Self-Narrative*. It is a fundamental human condition that we are accustomed to carefully guarding and concealing our *Private Self-Narrative* from others. Most of us are afraid that if people find out about who we are afraid we are, we will be totally alone and unable to survive. Thus, it is our fears about who we are afraid we are that threaten our very survival. Survival as used in this sense is not just the fear of being exposed and vulnerable, or the physical fear of being hurt or abandoned. Rather, we have found that the fear that holds *our Private Self-Narrative* in place comes from a much deeper level and is linked directly to our fear of dying. Thus, whether we characterize someone's *Public Self-Narrative a*s positive (e.g., a "strong" person) or as negative (e.g., a "bully"), we all rely on our *Public Self-Narrative* to protect our *Private Self-Narrative*. It is no wonder that this automatic, reactive, and dependent relationship between our "acts" and our "fears", our *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives*, has been called the Vicious Circle. It is also little wonder that professionals and parents/caregivers express frustration in trying to change the behavior of difficult or distressed children (or adults), not to mention the behavior of so-called normal children (or adults).

Our *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*

We have already established that the relationship between our *Public Self-Narrative* and our *Private Self-Narrative* is automatic, reactive, and dependent. However, we also assert that the automatic and reactive nature of this dependency produces *learning breakdowns*. Afraid of being seen as weak, the "bully" picks on others. Thus, the "bully" produces *learning breakdowns* for him or herself and others. When we find ourselves in reoccurring patterns of *learning breakdowns*, we say that we are caught in a "Vicious Circle."

A basic premise of the Taking Charge® approach is that what holds the Vicious Circle in place are the individual's *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives*, typically *ungrounded Self-Narratives* that close possibilities for learning. Again, *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives* are the pervasive, automatic, and ongoing conversations individuals have about themselves and the world that closes or opens possibilities for effective, *coordinated action*. Thus, the individual invents him or herself through language and "takes action" in the world consistent with the individual's own assessment of his or her *Level of Learning Competence* in taking effective, *coordinated action*.

Much like the notion of "selective attention" in psychology, our *Self-Narratives* arise out of our selective *listening.* In fact, recent studies have shown that this selective *listening* process begins *in utero*. That is, babies *listen* and learn while in the womb consistent with the sound of their mother's voice (rather than their father's voice), the language she speaks, and the movements she makes (Moon, Lagercrantz, Kuhl, 2013). Thus, we are born into the world as language beings, as selective *listeners*. As we age from infants onwards, we selectively *listen* to and assess our world consistent with our own underlying backgrounds of interpretation, our own *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives*. In this way, we invent ourselves through language. As an example, suppose we were to draw a horizontal timeline with all the events of our lives arranged as dots corresponding to the specific times in our lives that these events

occurred. And suppose we mark those events that we assess as "positive" above the horizontal timeline and those events that we assess as "negative" below the horizontal timeline. We might be surprised to find that we have created consistent stories about ourselves and others, our own underlying backgrounds of interpretation, our Public and Private *Self-Narratives*. Perhaps we have filtered out more "positive" events in our lives than "negative" events, or vice versa. Maybe we have created stories about ourselves, our *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives*, which close rather than open possibilities for learning. Whichever way our "stories" are skewed, the result is that our assessments of our own competence and the competence of others arise automatically rather than through *observation.* While selective *listening* allows us to filter the myriad of interpretations that we can make about our circumstances, and that we hear made by others, each day, it is clear that our "*listening"* filters can either close or open possibilities for learning to occur.

Consequently, it is important to distinguish between *learners' ungrounded* and *grounded* assessments of themselves. Often, when individuals speak about themselves, individuals repeat the "stories" they have invented about themselves, or that other people have said about them, for which there is no substantiating evidence of past <u>actions</u> to uphold the characterization (i.e., "I'm stupid."). We would then say that the individual has an *ungrounded* self-assessment. On the other hand, an individual whose self-assessment is "I am a truant" and whose record reflects a long string of being truant would be said to have a *grounded* self-assessment. As someone gains the ability to make *grounded* versus *ungrounded* assessments about competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*, the individual moves out of the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* and into a new domain of possibility, a new domain of <u>action</u>.

Essentially, the individual's fundamental *Self-Narrative* in the Vicious Circle is: "**I am my thoughts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, feelings, and sensations."** That is, the individual does not step outside their circumstances to *observe* "something happening in his or her world." The individual is unable to *observe* his or her own assumptions or own underlying background of interpretation. Rather, the individual is reactive, makes *ungrounded* assessments about his or her learning competence, and does not recognize the possibility that learning can occur. Thus, in the Vicious Circle, the individual's *Self-Narrative* includes such *linguistic* statements as: "Who's to blame? It's not my fault. He/she did it. What's wrong with me? Why am I such a failure/loser? How can I lose? How can I win? How can I prove I'm right? How can I prove someone else is wrong? How can I be in control, dominate, manipulate, defend, and protect myself? Why are they picking on me? Why don't they understand me? No one is listening to me. Why bother? I don't care. No one cares about me. Nothing will change. Nothing is possible. How can I survive?"

The metaphor of the Vicious Circle is useful in looking even deeper into the pervasiveness and permanence of the mood of despair and resignation we often *observe* in distressed children and adults, and even in ourselves, when we are trapped in the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*. Since most of us have been taught that learning is about the accumulation of information, we do not see ourselves as *learners*, capable of learning how to learn, and capable of developing competence in new domains of <u>action</u> that can move us out of the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*. Thus, we feel helpless and hopeless in the face of the Vicious Circle. The *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* is our coping mechanism for dealing with our fears in a world in which we assess ourselves as not competent and have little hope of becoming competent.

Competence has to do with our ability to take care of our own concerns and the concerns of others. We are now beginning to see the extent to which the mood of despair and resignation in the Vicious Circle is directly linked to whether or not our *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives* close or open possibilities for effective, *coordinated action*.

The Taking Charge® approach advocates a conversation between the *Linguistic Coach* and *learners* that enables us to *observe* whether or not our *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives* are *ungrounded* or *grounded*, whether they close or open possibilities for learning and effective, *coordinated action*. However, the purpose of a *Linguistic Coaching*® conversation is not to judge any particular *Self-Narrative* as good or bad. Nor is *Linguistic Coaching*® an attempt to "change" someone's *Self-Narrative*. Rather, the purpose of a *Linguistic Coaching*® conversation is to work in *partnership* to establish a context for mutual learning leading to mutually agreed upon effective, *coordinated action*. Importantly, the role of the *Linguistic Coach* is to assist *learners* to recognize that, despite whatever *barriers to learning* that they have experienced, they are able and capable of developing competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*.

Barriers to Learning

A *barrier* is a *linguistic distinction* in which the individual's *Self-Narrative*, or underlying background of interpretation, serves as a barricade to an individual observing him or herself as a *learner*. Although "labels" can open possibilities, such as providing needed services or resources, often labels such as "special needs; at-risk; delinquent; gang member; school failure; assaultive behavior; substance abuse; parental abuse and neglect; disabled; drop-out, unemployed, etc." close possibilities for an individual to see him or herself as *whole, able, and complete* as a *learner,* capable of developing competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*.

The Taking Charge® approach advocates that no matter how devastating an individual's past experiences and actions have been, it is our interpretation of the event, our *Self-Narratives* about ourselves and the world around us, that closes or opens possibilities for learning and effective, *coordinated action* to occur. Simply put, when something happens in our world, there are two possibilities: (1) to react (i.e., close possibilities for learning) or (2) to *choose* to *observe* and take effective, *coordinated action*, to learn (i.e., open possibilities for learning).

That is not to say that abuse, violence, or exploitation by one person against another person should be ignored, condoned, or allowed to continue. And we agree that there should be natural or legal consequences for offensive, assaultive, or illegal actions. However, we also are suggesting that observing the *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives* that allow some individuals to operate outside the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* in which they find themselves, and to rise above the *barriers* to their own learning process, is a fundamental tenet of the Taking Charge® approach.

The notion of resilience, that some people are able to turn problems into opportunities, is not unfamiliar to us. Moreover, from our own experience we know that wanting to do something and actually doing it are two different things. That is what makes Rebecca's story about overcoming her own *barriers to learning* so remarkable. Rebecca was only 12 years old when her mother committed suicide and died in

her arms while Rebecca was waiting for help to arrive after calling 911. After going to live with her grandmother, Rebecca entered a difficult adolescent period, complete with aggressive, assaultive actions; drug abuse; an unwanted pregnancy; school truancy and failure; and previously undiagnosed learning disabilities. However, at least a decade after graduating from the Almansor Academy, a school for special needs students, Rebecca returned to report that she had completed her Master of Science in Nursing while raising her daughter as a single parent.

There were significant *barriers to learning* that could have and, perhaps, should have blocked Rebecca from continuing her education: learning disabilities; a traumatic childhood and adolescence; lack of time or money; lack of physical energy; family responsibilities; etc. Any one of these *barriers to learning* would have been sufficient to discourage her from going on to college and completing her master's degree. Yet, we all know "resilient" individuals, like Rebecca, who struggle to balance work and family and other significant challenges, manage to juggle all the *barriers to learning* in their lives, and still continue to do what is required until they reach their goals. The critical question is what is the relationship between an individual's *Self-Narratives*, resilience, and achievement in school and in life (Quillen, 2017)?

While there is no simple answer, it is important to note that when Rebecca returned to the Almansor Academy to report that she had earned her master's degree, she also related that during the three or four years she was at the Almansor Academy working with a *Linguistic Coach*, she discovered that she was not "stupid" like she initially thought she was, and that she loved learning. She remembered being shown the three *Domains of Being* diagram and asking her *Linguistic Coach*, "Why didn't you tell me this before?" She was 16 years old at the time. We would say that Rebecca had recognized a new possibility for herself outside her *Vicious Circle Self-N*arrative in which she was trapped. She saw herself as who she really was, the *learner* (i.e., the *Learner Self- Narrative)*. And her subsequent *Self-Narrative* and action as a *learner* reflected a new possibility for effective, *coordinated action*.

Another important point to make about why some resilient individuals overcome *barriers to learning* while others do not has to do with the notion that without the support of another *observer,* or *Linguistic Coach*, we may remain unaware or oblivious to the fact that our *Self-Narratives* have trapped us in a Vicious Circle. Thus, making it impossible for us to overcome our *barriers to learning*. While for most of us being caught in the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* is unproductive or even painful, it is familiar, even comfortable. Much like Brer Rabbit in the briar patch who said, "If it hurts, it must be home," the Vicious Circle is what we have come to expect. It confirms our *Self-Narratives*, our underlying backgrounds of interpretation, about ourselves and others. And, therefore, we accept our world as it is and we do not even bother to look to see if another possibility exists. Even if we see that there is another possibility for us, we do not believe that we are capable of learning and developing the competencies we need to handle our self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns* and move out of the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*. Here is where *Linguistic Coaching®,* a conversation with another *observer,* can help us step outside the circumstances in which we find ourselves to see new possibilities for effective, *coordinated action*.

However, to see a new opportunity for effective, *coordinated action* in a new and unknown domain of action (i.e., our *Learner Self-Narrative*) is to expose oneself to possible risk or failure. To take the risk to

move into the unknown requires trust – trust in oneself and trust in others. Trust in which the individual takes a stand that there is a new possibility for learning, even though there is no proof that such a possibility exists. This stand is a tall order when we are caught in the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*. While the role of the *Linguistic Coach* is to work in *partnership* with the *learner* to open up the possibility that a new domain of <u>action</u> exists – a domain of <u>action</u> in which learning can occur, to accomplish this, mutual trust and mutual respect are necessary.

Trust includes two *linguistic distincti*ons that need to be examined to determine whether someone is trustworthy or not: *competence* and *sincerity* (Flores, F. & Graves, M., 1986). *Competence* is a conversation in which an *observer* is able to assess an individual's <u>actions</u> in their self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns* as effective or ineffective, and/or to recognize that an individual can consistently deliver certain standards of performance in a particular domain of <u>action</u>. *Sincerity* is a conversation in which the *observer* recognizes that an individual's <u>actions</u> are consistent with his words, that the individual keeps his word and/or that the individual acknowledges and cleans up mistakes.

Respect also includes two *linguistic distinctions* that need to be examined to determine whether someone is worthy of respect: *competence* and *value*. We have described the *linguistic distinction* of *competence. Value* is a conversation in which the *observer* assesses that the standards of performance in a particular domain of <u>action</u> are worthwhile and important to the *coordinated action* in which he is engaged.

Often, we collapse *linguistic distinctions* in our conversations about trust and respect. A distressed young person or adult may go to his best friend for advice rather than to a "competent" professional because he trusts that his best friend is sincere, and believes the "competent" professional is not. Likewise, a distressed young person may respect his friends because he believes that a particular <u>action</u> or performance they provide him is valuable (i.e., the friends give him a sense of belonging and security which his family is not able to do), and not respect a "competent" teacher because he or she does not value what the teacher has to offer (i.e., required attendance at school every day).

It is important to recognize that people of all ages do not automatically respect or trust someone based on their roles, power, or authority (i.e., "I am the teacher (a doctor, a social worker); I deserve to be respected and trusted."). While we would agree that all of us need to be polite towards each other, we would argue that the *linguistic distinctions* "trust" and "respect" need to be earned over time as a consequence of mutual *observation* and learning leading to effective, *coordinated action*. Silva (2006) created useful formulas that provide a convenient summary of the relationship between trust, respect, competence, sincerity, value, and time:

Trust = (*competence + sincerity) time*   Respect = (*competence + value) time*

Our *Learner Self-Narrative*

The Taking Charge® point of view is that programs designed to change another person's behavior or alleviate their underlying fears are not necessarily sufficient to turn their lives around. Rather, what is called for is to empower individuals to *observe* a new possibility, a third domain of <u>action</u>, in which they

can <u>experience</u> themselves as *learners*, able to develop competencies to take care of their own concerns and the concerns of others. We call this new domain of <u>action</u>, "who we really are", the *Learner Self-Narrative*, the *observer*. Learning to "take action" that addresses our self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns* represents a real possibility for breaking out of the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* and naturally shifts individuals' *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives* from ones that close possibilities for learning to ones that open possibilities for learning and effective, *coordinated action*. Viewing oneself as a *learner* is not something that needs to be taught. We are all <u>innate</u> *learners*. And we all experience *barriers* to *observing* ourselves as *learners*, able to develop competence to handle our self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*.

Thus, the purpose of distinguishing three *Domains of Being*, or domains of <u>action</u>, is not to get rid of the "acts" that limit us by trying to change our behavior or our personalities; or to eliminate our underlying "fears"; or to even turn our negative *Self-Narratives* into positive *Self-Narratives*. Nor is the job of the *Linguistic Coach* to do away with the individual's *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* or *barriers to learning*. Rather, the purpose of making these *linguistic distinctions* is to enable the *Linguistic Coach* to work in *partnership* with learners to empower them to *observe* themselves as *learners*, capable of opening up new possibilities for learning and effective, *coordinated action* for themselves and others.

As *Linguistic Coaches*, we engage in a conversation with *learners* in situations of shared activity that allows us to work in *partnership* as *observers.* In that regard, we *observe* the *learner* making *linguistic* statements that are in sharp contrast to the automatic, reactive and dependent stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, our *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives*, and the *linguistic distinctions* that characterize the statements we make about ourselves within the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*.

The fundamental *Learner Self-Narrative* is: **I am a *learner*, an *observer*. I am *whole, able and complete just the way I am and just the way I am not*; I am a *learner*, capable of developing competence in my self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*.** The *Learner Self-Narrative* shows up in such *linguistic* statements as: What am I assuming? What are others assuming? What are my promises, requests, offers, assertions? What are others' promises, requests, offers, assertions? What am I responsible for? What are others responsible for? What have I *observed*? What have others *observed*? Is my *Self-Narrative* about myself and others *grounded* or *ungrounded*? What are the *agreements*? What are my (effective) *choices*? How can I work in *partnership* with others? What is possible? What works? What doesn't work? What are my concerns? What are other people's concerns? What steps do I need to take to learn____(i.e., develop competence in my self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*)? How do I learn best (e.g., visually, verbally, by touch, using assistive technology, etc.)? I'm just learning how to learn.

While it might be argued that very few *learners* can be self-reflective about their own learning possibilities, our experience over the years has shown that not to be the case. After discovering she could write a whole paragraph on her own (despite poor spelling), a 12-year-old girl exclaimed, "I'm just learning how to learn!" An eight-year-old, when explaining why he liked the Almansor Academy better than his old school said, "The teacher didn't know me." When asked, "Do you mean the teacher didn't know your name?" "No," he said, pointing to his heart, "The teacher didn't know who I really was." Six-year old Becca, a non-verbal *learner*, had been labeled school-phobic by her previous school. Crying

inconsolably on her first day in her new school, a *Linguistic Coach* asked her: "I bet you miss your mother?" Becca nodded her head vigorously, "Yes". The *Linguistic Coach* followed up by saying: "You know, everyone is a little scared on their first day in a new school. Would you like me to take you to your new class?" Becca responded with a short nod, "Yes". The *Linguistic Coach* then took Becca's hand and walked her into her class. Her teacher got her started drawing on a large vertical chalkboard standing in the room. By the end of the day, Becca was sitting at her desk working on paper-pencil tasks. A young adult, with developmental disabilities, after hearing the phrase "*we all whole, able, and complete just the way we are and just the way we are not*" exclaimed "I'm OK just the way I am!"

The question then arises, how can the *Linguistic Coach* support *learner*s to choose to take effective, *coordinated action*; how can *learners* be empowered to take *personal responsibility* for their own learning process? To begin to address these questions, we will examine four *linguistic distinctions*: the *learner* as *whole, able and complete*; *Self-Narrative*, self-esteem, and <u>action</u>; *personal responsibility*; and *choice*.

Whole, Able and Complete

A basic premise of the Taking Charge® approach is that there is in each one of us an <u>innate</u> *learner*, the *observer*. In this context, our capacity to learn is not a function of our intellectual, physical, biological, cultural, familial abilities or background, verbal or non-verbal abilities, gender or age. Thus, as a *learner*, *we are whole, able, and complete just the way we are and just the way we are not*. Any limitations are actually opportunities for learning to occur, enabling us to reach our full potential and <u>act</u> effectively in the world as competent, caring, and contributing members of society. The *Linguistic Coach* is a mirror, reflecting back to *learners* who look to us for confirmation that they are *whole, able and complete just the way they are and just the way they are not*. Thus, the fundamental job of the *Linguistic Coach* is to empower *learner*s to see for themselves that they are, indeed, capable of learning and developing competencies to take effective, *coordinated action* in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*. We have all had the experience of engaging in a conversation with someone (i.e., parent, friend, teacher, aunt, grandparent, or supervisor, etc.) who believes in us, who sees us as we really are or who points out something positive about ourselves that we did not previously recognize (e.g., "You have a good memory for details."). Their assessment of us opens possibilities for us to develop competence in new domains of <u>action</u> (e.g., "I remember details. I can learn to play Junior Scrabble even though I am only six years old."). Conversely, we all remember someone who made an assessment of us that may have stopped us in our tracks (e.g., "You have poor eye-hand coordination."). Whether or not their assessment was grounded, it can often close future possibilities for us to develop competence in new domains of <u>action</u> (e.g., "Someone once told me I have poor eye-hand coordination. Guess I won't try out for the soccer team."). Thus, the important role that the *Linguistic Coach* plays in empowering individuals to make *grounded* versus *ungrounded* assessments of themselves and to see themselves as *learners*, capable of developing competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns* cannot be overstated.

Self-Narrative, Self-Esteem, and Action

Often parents/caregivers and professionals working with *learners* of <u>all</u> ages and <u>all</u> abilities become burnt out due to the somewhat daunting notion that we must somehow build their self-esteem or teach these individuals new values so that they are ready to learn or to work. Accordingly, using affirmations to build self-esteem is seen as a way of replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts so that *learners* of all ages and <u>all</u> abilities gain a willingness to put forth effort. It is like the classic tale of the *Little Engine that Could* going up the hill puffing, "I think I can. I think I can. I think I can!"

However, repeating positive thoughts about ourselves is not always effective enough to bring forth effort and <u>action</u>. Nor is it a reliable tactic to assume that we can teach a young person to recognize the value of learning to read, or an adult the importance of work, as examples, for their future success. Moreover, while no one would deny that praise and rewards are meaningful and can be motivating to both children and adults, in the end most parents/caregivers and professionals discover that praise and rewards are only meaningful and motivating if the individuals themselves assess that their efforts are noteworthy. In fact, time after time, children and adults respond more favorably to a demanding teacher or supervisor with high expectations rather than one who is "nice" and allows them to produce sub-standard work.

In working with many *learners* over the years, it is increasingly evident that their *Self-Narratives* are a direct result of the <u>action</u> they take. In looking at the relationship between *Self-Narrative*, self-esteem, and <u>action</u>, it is obvious to us that talking about something, affirming our willingness to be or do something, even gaining insights into why we are or are not being or doing something, is not nearly as powerful as <u>action</u> itself. Moreover, in regard to the <u>action</u> that children or adults take, such as reading aloud in class or taking on a new job responsibility, their willingness to undertake the <u>action</u> is directly related to their *Self-Narratives* and assessment of themselves as competent to the <u>action</u> (i.e., "I am a good reader." versus "I am a poor reader." "I can ask for help and learn to do this new task." versus "I can't ask for help. I already know I can't do it".).

Consequently, individuals' willingness to put forth effort has much to do with past experiences of success and failure, what they have said about themselves or what others have said about them in the past, their *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives*. In other words, our *Self-Narratives* close or open possibilities for future <u>action</u>. The Taking Charge® approach holds that an individual's *Self-Narrative* of him or herself as a *learner* is, in and of itself, the most powerful predictor of subsequent <u>action</u>. Most models see the necessity of a motivational component to later behavior:

<p align="center">Self-esteem (affirmations) > motivation > behaviors</p>

In contrast, the Taking Charge® model proposes a direct link between our *Self-Narratives* as *learners*, self-esteem, language, and <u>action</u>. Indeed, we create our self-esteem through the language we use to describe ourselves, our *Self-Narratives*; and perhaps more important to this discussion, language is <u>action</u>:

<p align="center">*Self-Narrative* = self-esteem = language = <u>action</u></p>

Our contention is that it is really not necessary to "teach" or motivate someone to be a *learner* and put forth effort in the traditional sense of how we link self-esteem, motivation and learning. In fact, one of the primary tenets of the Taking Charge® approach is that we are all <u>innate</u> *learners* and we all face *barriers*, in certain domains of <u>action</u>, to the full realization of our learning potential. Thus, the Taking Charge® approach is to create a new environment, an *ecology* for learning, in which opportunities are available so that each of us naturally re-discovers for ourselves that we are <u>innate</u> *learners,* able to develop competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns* (see Creating an *Ecology* for Learning below).

Personal Responsibility

It is common for parents/caregivers, professionals, and the general public to lament, "What is the world coming to? People take no responsibility for themselves and their world. How can we teach people to be more responsible?" It is also common for us to characterize other people (not usually ourselves) as irresponsible when they take some <u>action</u> or make some *linguistic* statement that we assess as "irresponsible." That this characterization of people, especially children, as being irresponsible has been a common assessment over many generations does not make people think it is any less true. In fact, a quote attributed by Plato to Socrates (470-399 BC) underscores the idea that adults do not consider children to be as responsible as they themselves are: "The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are tyrants, not the servants of their household. They no longer rise when their elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers." Indeed, Socrates might have simply said, "Children are irresponsible."

Without getting into a debate about whether or not this type of assessment about young people is *grounded* or *ungrounded*, or whether or not this quote attributed to Socrates is verifiable, it is quite apparent that our underlying backgrounds of interpretation that "other" people, especially children, are not as "responsible" as we are has been an ongoing conversation among adults for hundreds, if not, thousands of years.

The Taking Charge® approach defines *personal responsibility* somewhat differently and relates *personal responsibility* directly to the learning process. The Taking Charge® approach views *personal responsibility* as <u>innate</u> to all *learners*. Therefore, it is not necessary to teach someone to be *personally responsible*. Rather, the role of the *Linguistic Coach* is to empower *learners* to *observe* that they are already, and always have been, *personally responsible* for their own learning process. *Personal responsibility* in this context is assessed as the willingness to see oneself as the source of one's own learning successes and *learning breakdowns* in life. However, being "*personally responsible*" for one's own learning successes and *learning breakdowns* in life does not imply blame, guilt, or fault (i.e., "It's my fault. It's the parents' or teachers' or my boss's fault."). Rather, it is the willingness to examine the effectiveness of one's own *Speech Acts* in closing or opening possibilities for effective, *coordinated action*; the willingness to see oneself as a *learner* (*observer*), able to develop competence in handling self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*.

In Taking Charge®, *personal responsibility* also means being 100% responsible for our learning successes and *learning breakdowns* in life. It is common for us to say, "I'll do my 50% if you do your 50%." However, in taking 50% responsibility for our *Speech Acts* and <u>actions</u>, we should not be surprised when only 50% of the results we want are produced. On the other hand, if each one of us takes 100% responsibility for our *Speech Acts* and <u>actions</u>, we are taking 100% of the responsibility for producing the results we want. In the world of *personal responsibility*, there is no such thing as, "It's the other guy's fault." Rather, taking 100% responsibility means, "You can count on me to look to see how my *Speech Acts c*lose and open possibilities for effective, *coordinated action*. And you can count on me to turn *learning breakdowns* into learning opportunities, 100% of the time." However, to examine our learning successes and *learning breakdowns* in life, to see ourselves as *learners* and *observers personally responsible* for our own learning process, requires the support of another *observer*, the *Linguistic Coach* (see *Dialogues for Action* below).

Choice

The nature of *choice* has long been debated in philosophical and religious circles. Do any of us really have free *choice* or free will? What is often missing in these discussions is that it is our *Public* and *Privat*e *Self-Narratives* (our underlying backgrounds of interpretation) that determine the nature of our thoughts, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, feelings, and sensations, and the subsequent <u>action</u> we take. And our *Public* and *Private Self-Narratives* can close or open possibilities for us to make *choices* and <u>act</u> in the world effectively.

In working with *learners*, the role of "*choice*" in their education or therapeutic process is particularly relevant (White, 2008). If our goal is to empower people to "take charge" of their own learning process, then their ability to *choose* to *observe* and take effective <u>action</u> in the world (opening possibilities for learning) versus react (closing possibilities for learning) is critical in enabling them (and us) to reach that goal. By *choosing* to *observe* and take effective action (open possibilities for learning), the *learner* has taken *personal responsibility* for his or her own learning process.

A basic tenet of the Taking Charge® approach is to work in *partnership* with *learners* to empower them to make *choices* and take effective, *coordinated action* that is conducive to the well-being of the *learner* as well as others. To that end, Taking Charge® defines *choice* as the privilege or opportunity of freely selecting alternatives of effective, *coordinated action* in a particular self-identified *Domain of Life Concerns*. "*Structured Choice*" is guidance of the *learner* by the *Linguistic Coach* based on the *learner's* <u>demonstrated</u> *Level of Learning Competence* in a particular domain of <u>action</u> (see *Learner's Levels of Learning Competence* and *Dialogues for Action* below).

In *partnership* with the *learner*, the *Linguistic Coach* creates an *ecology* for learning in which mutual learning, trust, and respect naturally lead to *choice* and *personal responsibility* (see Creating an *Ecology* for Learning below). As *learners* gain competence in making effective *choices*, *learner*s are empowered to "take charge" of their own learning process. The relationship among *Learners' Self-Narratives*; *Learners' Domains of* Life Concerns; *Learners' Level of Learning Competence*; Creating an *Ecology* for Learning; and *Dialogues for Action* is shown in the Diagram B below.

Diagram B
Learner Self-Narrative
Opening Possibilities for Learning
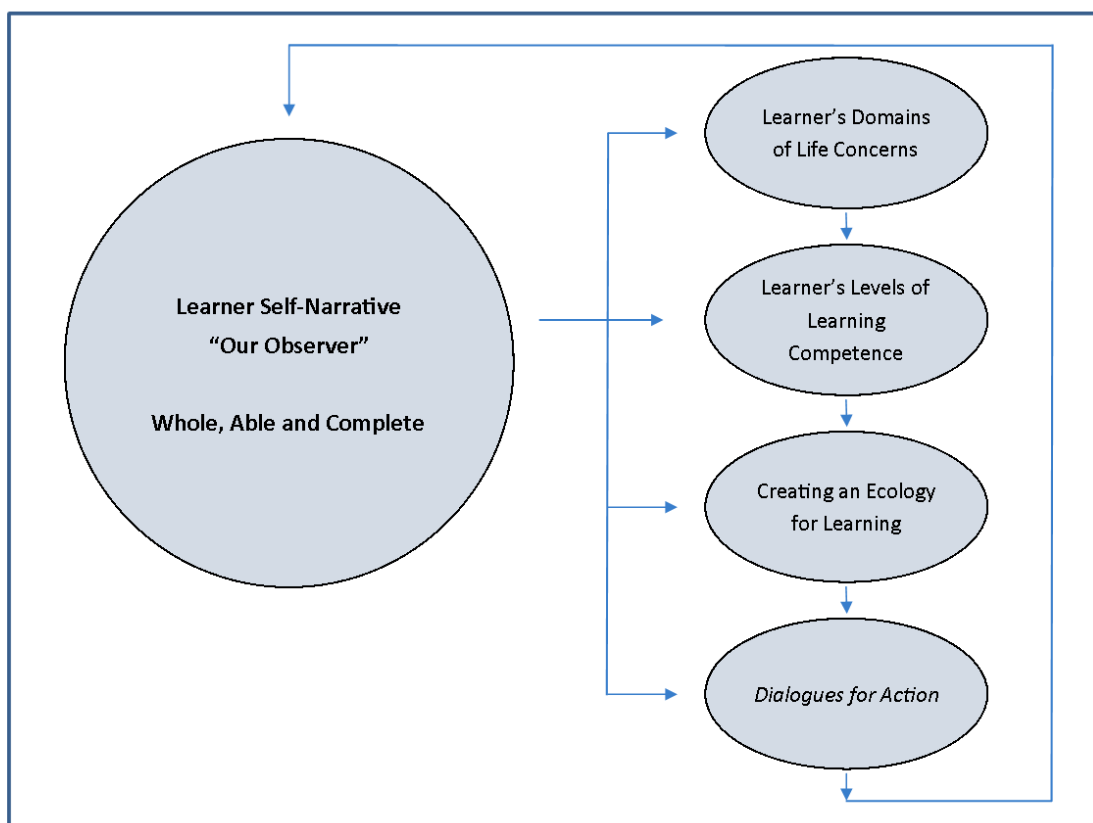
Learners' Domains of Life Concerns

A basic tenet of the Taking Charge® approach is that all human beings have basic, fundamental concerns about various areas of their lives (Flores, F. & Graves, M, 1986). A *learner's* concerns show up as a blend of interest, uncertainty, and apprehension regarding the assessment of his or her own competence in a particular domain of action. A *learner* assesses him or herself as having or not having the requisite abilities, qualities, or skills to develop competence in a particular domain of concern.

While our concerns may change over time, dealing effectively and competently with our concerns is naturally motivating. Conversely, when we believe ourselves to be incompetent to deal with our concerns, we may begin to despair and appear "unmotivated" to ourselves and others (i.e., the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative).* As *Linguistic Coaches*, we begin to *listen* to *learners* differently. When learning is structured around the concerns that *learners* have, *learners* are readily "self-motivated."

Following the work of Flores and Graves, we have identified eleven *Domains of Life Concerns* among *learners*: body/health (including safety and security); activities/pastimes; social/relationships; family;

work/career; school/education; money/finances; personal worth; coping/emotions; spirituality; and the world. Our assumption is that these types of concerns form the backdrop upon which *learners* base their future actions. Most importantly, our assessment of ourselves as able or not able to develop competence to handle our self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns* closes or opens possibilities for future, effective *coordinated action*. The role of the *Linguistic Coach* is to assist the *learner* to identify their own *Domains of Life Concerns* and determine what steps might be taken to develop competence to handle those concerns.

Unfortunately, adults often fail to recognize the importance of structuring learning around the concerns that *learners* have identified. Or, constrained by various educational or therapeutic requirements (e.g., all ninth graders must complete Algebra and World History; or school-based therapy can not include family therapy; or a homeless adult must have a job before being eligible for housing, etc.), adults may be unable to creatively find ways to meet these requirements while structuring learning around the *learner's* concerns. The result is somewhat predictable for many people that we consider to be "unmotivated."

Paul was diagnosed as being on the Autism Spectrum at a very young age. At sixteen years old, Paul was a bright and gifted individual who characterized himself as a "poet savant." He made insightful observations about his diagnosis on the Autism Spectrum and wrote vivid poetry bemoaning how lonely he was and how much he wanted friends. Yet, the goals on his Individual Education Plan (IEP) did not reflect his self-awareness, his poetry gift, nor his concern about not having friends. Instead, his IEP focused on his meeting his high school graduation requirements. Alarmingly, one of his IEP goals was to "remain in his seat for 20 minutes at a time." These goals may have reflected the concerns of his parents and his teachers, but certainly did not reflect the concerns that Paul had himself expressed in poem after poem he wrote about being lonely. Thus, not surprisingly, Paul rarely completed his academic work and frequently left class without permission, claiming he was bored. Paul was characterized by his teachers as "unmotivated." It might be argued that designing a learning program that would accommodate Paul's gift as a poet and his concern about not having friends (without negating his parents' or teachers' concerns) would be time consuming and outside the scope of a typical educational setting. However, it is equally evident that even more time was spent trying to "motivate" Paul to complete his high school graduation requirements and "manage" Paul's behavior to prevent him from leaving class without permission. Therefore, the lesson for us as *Linguistic Coaches* is to ask ourselves, is the *learner* really unmotivated or, more importantly, what are the concerns that *learners* have and how we can we support them to develop competence to meet their self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*?

Learners' Levels of Learning Competence

Learning is an innate capacity within all human beings. A *learner* naturally moves through *Levels of Learning Competence* within a *Domain of Life Concerns* (Flores, F. & Graves, M., 1986). For example, in a consensual domain of action with others, a baby usually, and quite spontaneously, learns to raise his head, roll over, sit, crawl, pull himself up, stand, hold someone's hand, and then take a first step while learning to walk. However, at times, a *learner's* natural inclination to learn is blocked. There are *barriers to learning*. Sometimes these *barriers* are significant: physiological, nutritional, and nurturing

differences. However, even with optimum learning conditions, each individual learns at his or her own rate and in his or her own way. There is really no one way that learning occurs. What is common to all *learners*, however, is that we all move through *Levels of Learning Competence* within self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*, and in doing so we are learning how to learn. Adapting the work of Flores and Graves, we have identified seven *Levels of Learning Competence* from "*Bull in the China Shop*" to *Master*.

Level I: "*Bull in the China Shop*". At this level, the *learner* produces *learning breakdowns*, which others recognize, even without the *learner* being aware of them. An example might be a student who walks into a classroom talking loudly, with hair disheveled, bumping into other students' desks, and dropping things on the way. Other students may react angrily and say that he or she is deliberately disrupting them and causing trouble. Like a bull in a real china shop, he or she is awkward and has no control over his body; no one really wants him around; and he makes everyone miserable.

Whether or not the "*bull in the china shop*" is deliberately disruptive is not the key point. We would argue that this *learner* is not even aware of the learning opportunity that is available. Thus, the *learner* has no control over his <u>actions</u> or, rather, "reactions." He or she does not know that he is a bull or that he is in a china shop. He or she might be described as asleep, unaware, or non-observant of the domain of learning in which he finds himself. He is still caught up in the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* between his "acts" and his "fears". What is missing for the "*bull in the china shop*" is dignity and self-respect. Would any self-respecting bull find himself in a china shop? Similarly, a *learner* whose <u>actions</u> or *Speech Acts* generate an assessment where people say he is "deliberately disruptive" could be said to lack dignity and self-respect.

Key to Coordinating Action: *To work in partnership with learners to create an ecology for learning that empowers <u>all</u> learners to act with dignity and self-respect.*

Level II: *"Slow to Warm Up."* The "*slow to warm up*" *learner* also produces *learning breakdowns*. In this case, the "*slow to warm up*" *learner* is aware he or she is in a classroom and still acts the same way as the "bull in the china shop." He or she refuses to accept the requests or directions of the *Linguistic Coach* or others in the classroom. While the "*slow to warm up*" *learner* may be playing by his own rules, he is still unable to assess himself as a *learner* moving thorough *Levels of Learning Competence* within certain self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*. In that sense, he remains unaware and unable to make *choices* that lead to effective, *coordinated action*, such as being "appropriate in the classroom." What is missing for the *learner* who is "*slow to warm up*" is trust. That is, the *learner* does not trust himself or others. A *learner* who is "*slow to warm* up" requires evidence that keeping the classroom *agreements*, for example, will actually lead him to gain competence within a self-identified *Domain of Life Concerns*. Not only is he unable to assess himself as a *learner*, he is unable to trust that he can learn from others. For *learners* who have had repeated experiences of failure in learning situations, trust in teachers, therapists, the *Linguistic Coach*, and others in positions of authority is likely to be minimal at best.

Key to Coordinating Action: *To work in partnership with learners to create an ecology for learning that establishes mutual learning, mutual trust, and mutual respect.*

Level III: *Beginner.* The *beginner* is completely aware of the distinction of a domain of <u>action</u> (e.g., "being appropriate in the classroom"). However, he is aware that he cannot perform effective <u>actions</u> in the domain and is willing to be taught by the *Linguistic Coach* (i.e., teacher) whom he accepts as an authority in the classroom. Thus, the *beginner* is willing to ask for help from the *Linguistic Coach* and wants to know how to develop competence in "being appropriate in the classroom." In this case, he is beginning to trust himself and someone else's competence. He is beginning to *observe* himself as a *learner* able to develop competence, such as participating in the development of, and following, the classroom *agreements*. What is missing for the *beginner* is the ability to be a capable *observer* of his own <u>actions</u> as being effective or ineffective. When *learning breakdowns* do occur, it is important for the *Linguistic Coach* to *observe* the *learner* as a *beginner* rather than as a troublemaker. This level of competence implies that dignity and self-respect as well as mutual trust and mutual respect are already part of the "dance" of learning how to learn, and thus, the *Linguistic Coach* and the *learner* are learning together.

Key to Coordinating Action: *To work in partnership with learners to empower them to be observers of their own learning process; to engage in conversations with learners to coordinate mutual learning and effective, coordinated action.*

Level IV: *Minimally Competent.* The *minimally competent learner* is someone who has begun to act effectively in the domain of <u>action</u> (i.e., appropriately in the classroom) and is usually accepting of the mutually agreed upon *agreements* (i.e., the classroom *agreements*). Yet, the *minimally competent learner* does not yet trust himself to act independently. *Minimally competent learners* recognize that they may produce big *learning breakdowns* if left to themselves and rely on the *Linguistic Coach* to provide them with cues or support to avoid *learning breakdowns*. For example, a *minimally competent learner* learning how to be "appropriate in the classroom" may know how to enter a classroom quietly and work on some assignments on his own, but not yet be able to work independently in some academic areas or in a group with others. He can ask for help or ask to be excused from an activity or task that he believes he will fail (e.g., "I need help with math;" or "I need to work alone, not with the group."). He can *observe* other *learners* as being effective and ineffective. He is able to assess his own effectiveness with the support of the *Linguistic Coach*. Yet, he still relies on directions and supervision from the *Linguistic Coach* who is available to answer questions and spot potential *learning breakdowns* as they are about to occur. He is able to engage in a *Linguistic Coaching*® conversation to identify his concerns and the steps it will take to develop competence to handle his concerns. However, he is not yet ready to anticipate *learning breakdowns* and resolve them on his own.

Key to Coordinating Action: *To work in partnership with learners to empower them to be independent observers of their own concerns in a particular domain of <u>action</u> and the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the <u>action</u> they take to develop competence in meeting those concerns; to empower learners to anticipate and resolve learning breakdowns.*

Level V: *Competent.* The *competent learner* is someone who can perform independently in the *learner's* self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns* and can anticipate and deal with *learning breakdowns* on his own. For example, the *competent learner* can <u>act</u> effectively and appropriately in the classroom and

anticipate *learning breakdowns* before they occur. Although he follows the classroom *agreements*, he does so in a seemingly natural and effortless way. He can assess his own competence as effective or ineffective. The *Linguistic Coach* and other students recognize that he performs well. An example is the *learner* who now handles both independent and group learning activities well, and produces results that the *Linguistic Coach* (his parents and others) consider to be good results. He does not produce great *learning breakdo*wns and deals effectively with whatever *learning breakdowns* that confront him in in the domain of "being appropriate in the classroom." However, being *competent* in one domain of <u>action</u> does not preclude that the *learner* is not a "*bull in a china shop*," or "*slow to warm up,*" or a *beginner,* or *minimally competent* in another domain.

Key to Coordinating Action: *To work in partnership with learners to empower them to develop competence in other self-identified Domains of Life Concerns.*

Level VI: *Virtuoso.* A *virtuoso* is a *learner* who excels in a domain of <u>action</u>. He <u>acts</u> without the need for the support of the *Linguistic Coach* in the deliberation of the <u>action</u> he takes, rules, or instructions. He fully "dances" in the domain (i.e., being appropriate in the classroom). He performs whatever <u>action</u> is needed at the time it is needed to prevent *learning breakdowns* from happening or to respond successfully to the *learning brea*kdowns that have occurred. The *Linguistic Coach*, other students, the *learner's* parents, and others recognize and admire his competence. The *virtuoso learner* does more than just produce good results – he raises the standards that have been historically accepted in the domain of <u>action</u>. This is the *learner* who produces superior results in certain domains of <u>action</u> (i.e., being appropriate in the classroom; demonstrating computer expertise; taking care of younger children; speaking at Parent Night; growing plants; shooting baskets; writing poetry, etc.). He is the one who other *learners* look up to and seek to learn from. He may exhibit what others call his own learning style or <u>action</u> in the domain.

Key to Coordinating Action: *To work in partnership with learners to provide them with the opportunity to coach others in the domain of <u>action</u> in which they excel.*

Level VII: *Master.* Finally, there is the *master,* a *learner* of "historical excellence". What sets this *learner* apart is that he participates in the very invention of the domain in which he <u>acts</u>. This *learner* can produce radical innovations in the standard practices of the domain – the usual <u>actions</u> participants in the domain perform, in how they perform them, and in the results they produce. This *learner* is not just able to perform in the domain; he is able to make a revolution in the history of the domain of <u>action</u>. As an example, this would be the *learner* who steps out of the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* and overcomes significant *barriers to learning*, such as Rebecca (discussed above), to achieve his or her goals and become a competent, caring, and contributing member of society. By the way, it was not necessary for Rebecca to obtain a graduate-level degree to demonstrate her learning competence as a *master* in this illustration of *Levels of Learning Competence*. Rebecca became a *master* when she *chose* to step out of her *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*, go beyond her *barriers to learning*, take charge of her own learning process, and produce effective results (i.e., *coordinated action*) to achieve her goals.

Key to Coordinating Action: *To work in partnership with learners to provide them with the opportunity to "invent" in new domains of* <u>action</u>.

Often, we tend to make global, ungrounded assessments and judgments about ourselves and others as *learners*: lazy, stupid, smart, apathetic, motivated, unmotivated, etc. However, these global, *ungrounded* assessments fail to "take into account" that all *learners* move through *Levels of Learning Competence* within certain domains of <u>action</u>, from "*Bull in the China Shop*" to *Maste*r. Making global, *ungrounded*, and pervasive assessments, in and of themselves, become *barriers to learning*. As *Linguistic Coaches* and *learners*, it is important to recognize in which *Level of Learning Competence* we are operating for a particular domain of <u>action</u> so that we make *choices* that allow us to move into the next *Level of Learning Competence*, and, in turn, take *personal responsibility* for our own learning process.

Creating an *Ecology* for Learning

A learning *ecology* is the relationship among *learners*, the Linguistic Coach, and their environment that fosters effective, *coordinated action*. *Linguistic Coaching*® is a conversation that helps us *observe* and restate the commitment structures in our *linguistic* <u>acts</u> (i.e., *Speech Acts*) and, therefore, *coordinate action*. Examples of a learning *ecology* include the classroom; the school campus; the home environment; a therapeutic milieu; the workplace; the community, or wherever learning takes place.

As language beings, our interactions with each other and with our environment can be likened to a "dance", that is, *coordinated action*. The juxtaposition of the poetic notion of "dancing" as compared to behavior management is striking and begins to set the stage for designing an *ecology* for learning that is in sharp contrast to the usual discussions about "managing or changing behavior" or "discipline." Thus, creating an *ecology* for learning is not a structure set up to control *learners'* behaviors or enforce discipline or establish a set of rules. Rather, creating an *ecology* for learning is an opportunity to work in *partnership* with *learners* to build a mutually effective learning environment, to *coordinate action*.

Indeed, the deliberate use of the word learning *ecology* points to the importance of *observing* the *coordinated action* among *learners*, the *Linguistic Coach*, and their environment. Often *observation* of the learning environment is linear and unidirectional, such as when an adult *observes* different aspects of the "environment" as part of an effort to change a student's behavior. In contrast, the Taking Charge® approach is to *observe* the *linguistic distinctions* that are part of the coordinated "dance" that makes up the learning *ecology* for the Linguistic Coach and for each *learner* and each group of *learners*: *learners' Public, Private*, *Vicious Circle*, *and Learner Self-Narratives*, learners' self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns* (e.g., body/health, school, family, world, etc.), and *learners' Levels of Learning Competence*, etc. Importantly, the Taking Charge® approach focuses on the underlying commitments in the speaking and *listening* (i.e., *Speech Acts*) of the *Linguistic Coa*ch and *learners* that form the basis for effective, *coordinated action*.

The importance of *observation* in creating an *ecology* for learning is seen in the following anecdote. In the primary class at the Almansor Academy, as in classrooms at all age levels, the children engage in a conversation with the teacher (e.g., the *Linguistic Coach*) at the beginning of each year to establish the classroom *agreements*. Unlike rules, these *agreements* are jointly decided upon by the teachers and the

students, with the sole purpose of creating *coordinated action*. Thus, one of the *agreements* is that children can work together as partners at various times throughout the day (during academic tasks, during lunch, during free *choice* time, etc.) as long as they "support" each other appropriately. On this occasion, eight-year-old Giovanni kept calling across the room, trying to get Alfred's attention. Alfred was sitting quietly at his desk working with and "supporting" Scottie. He ignored Giovanni. Clearly, Alfred was keeping the classroom *agreement* about being "partners." Instead of telling Giovanni to be quiet or to stop calling out, the *Linguistic Coac*h said to Giovanni, "Did you notice that Alfred didn't answer you? That's because he's partners with Scottie." Giovanni's look of anger and frustration changed to one of understanding and acceptance, and he quickly went back to his own assignment.

In this classroom, the *agreements* are part of the learning *ecology* that supports the teacher (i.e., *Linguistic Coach*) in being able to *observe* children and engage in a conversation with them that opens opportunities for learning to occur. Giovanni's <u>action</u> (a look of understanding and acceptance and returning quickly to his own assignment) followed from the *Linguistic Coach's observation* that what was missing for Giovanni was the *linguistic distinction* about what it meant to be a "partner." Thus, the *Linguistic Coach's* role was not that of a disciplinarian or a behavioral change specialist, but rather as an *observer* "*coordinating action*" in *partnership* with Giovanni. By viewing Giovanni as at the "*minimally competent*" *Level of Learning Competence* and as a potential *observer* rather than a "behavior problem," the *Linguistic Coach* was able to engage Giovanni in a brief "conversation" (one in which Giovanni responded with his body "language" rather than with words) that facilitated Giovanni's ability to *observe* and learn for himself. In the event that Giovanni was unable to return to his assignment, the *Linguistic Coach* would then engage in a further *dialogue* with Giovanni, beginning with an "Inquiry" such as "Giovanni, are you OK? or Do you need support? or Do you have a request?" (See *Dialogues for Action* below.)

In partnership with Giovanni, Alfred, Scottie and, presumably, all the students, the *Linguistic Coach* had clearly established a learning *ecology* of mutual learning, trust, and respect. With the classroom *agreements* in place (i.e., *coordinated action*), the *Linguistic Coach* was able to *observe* Giovanni's concern (e.g., wanting Alfred's attention) and his *Level of Learning Competence* (i.e., minimally *competent*) and engage in a conversation with Giovanni that prevented a minor *learning breakdown* from escalating into a serious *learning breakdown*.

Creating an *ecology* for learning, the *Linguistic Coach* also recognizes the importance of observing the moods or underlying backgrounds of interpretation, the *learner's* unspoken *Self-Narratives*, that permeate the learning setting (i.e., a classroom, therapeutic milieu, or wherever learning takes place). We have already noted that <u>all</u> *learners* have often experienced histories of learning failure with resultant unspoken *Self-Narratives* or pervasive moods of despair and resignation (i.e., the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*). These pervasive moods of despair and resignation do not just live in *learners'* spoken and unspoken *Self-Narratives* but also in their bodies (e.g., withdrawn or aggressive acts; sleeping in class; self-destructive <u>actions</u>; sad, angry, hostile, or defiant demeanors; poor posture; poor personal hygiene, etc.). Rather than the *Linguistic Coach* trying to change the moods present in *learners'* bodies, the learning *ecology* itself can be designed in such a way that a mood of anticipation for learning occurs. A basic premise of Taking charge® is that our moods respond in

different ways in different learning *ecologies.* Since our interpretation of ourselves and others, our *Self-Narratives*, live in our bodies, shifting the learning *ecology* allows our bodies to interact in different ways and to experience different ways of *observing* ourselves and those around us. Importantly, one of the primary outcomes of creating an effective *ecology* for learning is that *learners* are empowered to naturally shift the moods that live in their bodies, their *Self-Narratives*, from ones that close learning possibilities to ones that open learning possibilities (see the anecdote in the *Dialogues for Action* section below about how a new learning *ecology* enabled Arturo to naturally shift his mood which opened new possibilities for learning for himself and his *Linguistic Coach*).

The *Linguistic Coach's* guiding principle for designing the learning *ecology* is whether or not it closes or opens possibilities for *learners* to see themselves as *learners*, *whole, able, and complete just the way they are and* j*ust the way they are not, capable of making effective choices and taking personal responsibility* for their own learning processes. Consequently, it is critical for the *Linguistic Coach* to work in *partnership* with learners to *observe* the impact of a multitude of environmental elements on closing or opening possibilities for learning for each *learner* and group of *learners*: sound; music; lighting; color; humor/laughter; indoor versus outdoor learning activities; the organization and arrangement of the room/setting, seating, and materials; scheduling assignments and activities; timing; direction-giving; housekeeping; the establishment of mutual *agreements*; purposeful movement; collaborative learning; innovative methods and materials; the match between the *learner's* individual learning style and the curriculum or program; the use of assistive technology, etc. In turn, by working in p*artnership* with *learners* to create an effective learning *ecology*, the *Linguistic Coach* will experience him/herself as a facilitator of learning rather than as a disciplinarian or behavior management specialist. A thorough description of how to establish an effective learning *ecology* can be found in *Taking Charge® for Educators and Related Professionals: Linguistic Coaching® for Learners of <u>All</u> Abilities* (Lavelle, 2003).

Dialogues for Action

A *Dialogues for Action dialogue* is the minimal unit of conversation in which an interplay of *Speech Acts* (i.e., assertions, offers, requests, and promises) are directed toward effective, *coordinated action* (see the discussion of *Speech Acts* above). In the *Dialogues for Action* process, as in all *Linguistic Coaching®* conversations, we are not just speaking and *listening*. Rather, we are engaging in a *dialogue* with the intention of *observing* the underlying backgrounds of interpretation (i.e. our *Self-Narratives*) and the underlying commitments in the speaking and *listening* of ourselves and others (i.e., our *Speech Acts*). Through experience, we have identified nine *Dialogues for Action* that provide a guide for engaging *learners* in the *dialogue* process: Inquiry; Acknowledgement; Setting Up for a Conversation; Examining Assumptions; *Structured Choice*; Commitment; Setting Up for the Next Task/Activity; Clearing; and Feedback and Consequences (see Diagram C below).

Diagram C
Dialogues for Action
"The Dance"
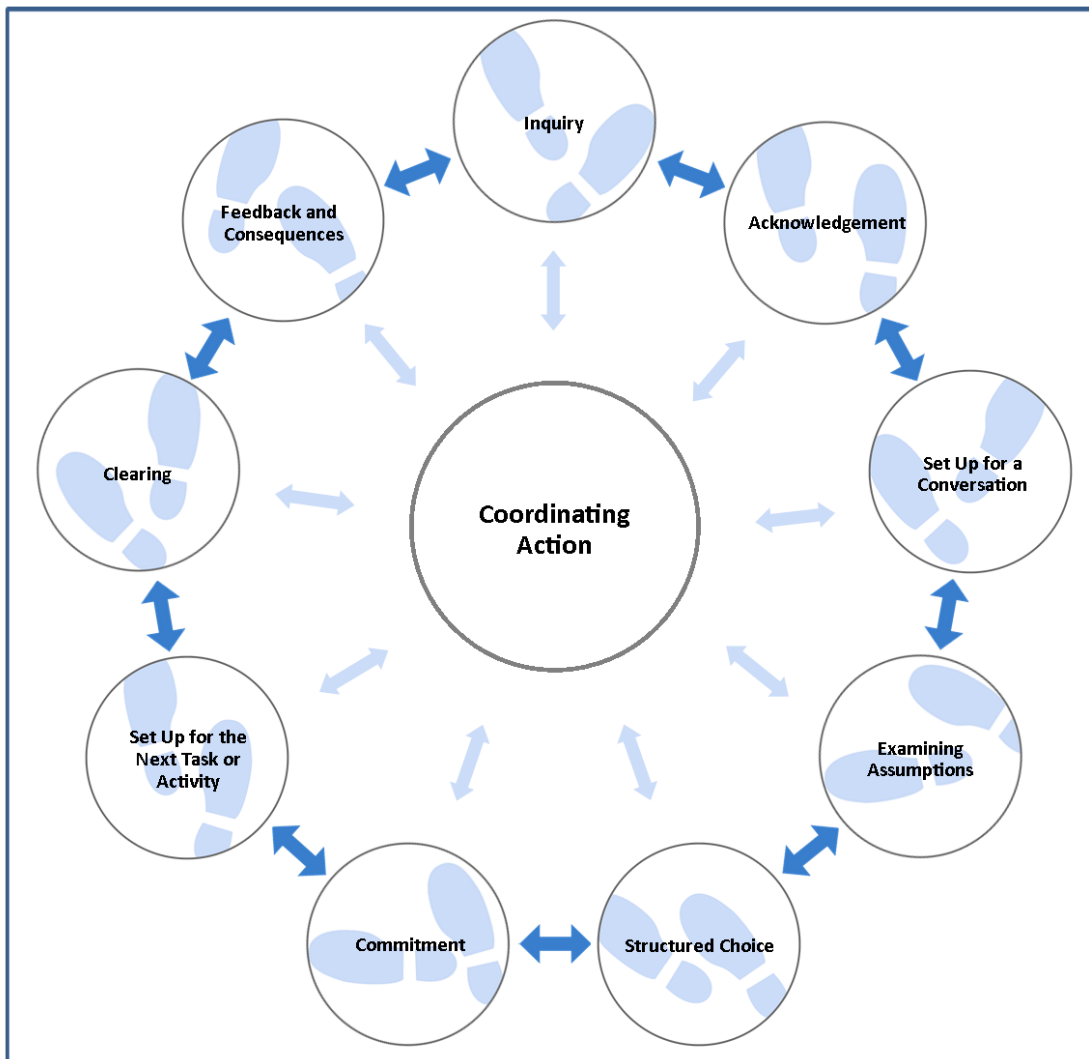
Linguistic Coaching® and the *Dialogues for Action* process presuppose an *observer*, the Linguistic Coach, who empowers the *learner* to be an *observer* him/herself. An *observer* is someone who makes *grounded linguistic distinctions* and is able to operate as if external to the circumstances in which he or she finds themselves. The ability to *observe* our underlying backgrounds of interpretation (i.e., *Self-Narratives*) and the underlying commitments in our speaking and *listening (i.e., Speech Acts)* is not always readily apparent. That is why engaging in both *Linguistic Coaching*® conversations and the *Dialogues for Action* process is called a "dance," and is not simply a detailed procedure to be followed.

Throughout the discussion above, we have spoken repeatedly about opening possibilities for the *Linguistic Coach* and *learners* to *observe* and take effective, *coordinated action*, to learn. *Learning breakdowns* are a break in effective, *coordinated action*. We have already noted that our *Self-Narratives*

emerge in reoccurring patterns of *learning breakdowns* and the resultant feedback from another speaker or *listener*, the *Linguistic Coach*. When we find ourselves in reoccurring patterns of *learning breakdowns*, we say that we are caught in a "Vicious Circle." Engaging in the *Dialogues for Action* process as *observers*, the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* can identify the source of the *learning breakdown*. Working in *partnership*, the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* can, then, identify the subsequent *Speech Acts*, or committed courses of <u>action</u>, that will allow the *Linguistic Coach* and *learner* to move out of the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*, <u>act</u> effectively in resolving the *learning breakdown* and, thereby, *coordinate action.*

While we have also asserted that *learning breakdowns* actually facilitate the learning process, there is no doubt that *learning breakdowns* can "throw" us back into the Vicious Circle, the automatic, reactive, and dependent relationship between our *Public* and *Private-Self Narratives*. Remember that the purpose of the *Public Self-Narrative* is to manipulate, dominate, and control others in order to defend and protect our *Private Self-Narrative*. Since the *Public Self-Narrative* covers up our fear of who we are afraid we are, when we experience a *learning breakdown* that "throws" us back into the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*, our very survival is threatened. While most *learning breakdowns* are a result of seemingly minor miscommunications (e.g., divergent assumptions regarding broken promises, unfulfilled expectations, thwarted intentions, undelivered communications, etc.), when we are caught in the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*, a minor miscommunication can easily lead to a *learning breakdown* that is not only intense but aggressive and violent. Consequently, *learning breakdowns* can range from mild breaks in ongoing <u>action</u> to more serious *learning breakdowns* that require a more intensive intervention to resolve the *learning breakdown* and to provide for the safety of the *learner*, the *Linguistic Coach*, and others (Penafiel, M., 2016). However, whether the *learning breakdown* is minor or more serious, over the years we have discovered that engaging in the *Dialogues for Action* process with *learners* is the most effective way to not only prevent *learning breakdowns* from becoming serious, but also turn *learning breakdowns* into learning opportunities.

The importance of recognizing that both the *Linguistic Coaching*® conversation and the *Dialogues for Action* process is a "dance" and not a procedure to be followed is shown in the following anecdote about a *learning breakdown* apparently triggered by undelivered communications. When fourteen-year-old Arturo got mad, he would yell at or push someone to get his way, and then run out of the classroom without permission. One time, his *Linguistic Coach* found him on the porch, overlooking the preschool playground, looking angry and miserable with a big scowl on his face. Clearly, Arturo had experienced a *learning breakdown* that "threw" him back into his *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*. His *Linguistic Coach* asked Arturo, "Are you all right?" but Arturo refused to speak. His Linguistic Coach noticed that Arturo was watching two preschoolers who were both pulling on the same toy. Soon one preschooler began to push the other one who began crying and pushing back. Finally, hearing both children crying, the preschool teacher came over to investigate. The *Linguistic Coach* asked Arturo, "Did you notice that neither one of those preschoolers used words to say what they wanted?" Arturo didn't answer. The *Linguistic Coach* continued, "You know, when children are young, people don't expect them to use words, and pushing and crying to get what they want is considered fairly normal. However, as children get older, people expect them to use words to tell when they want something or are angry about

something. In fact, when older children push, it becomes very serious because they can really hurt someone. I bet people have those same expectations of you." By this time, Arturo's face had begun to soften, his posture relax, and the scowl was leaving his face. "The funny thing is," continued the *Linguistic Coach*, "when we get angry, that's the hardest time to use words. I bet you get disappointed in yourself and that's why you leave the room without permission." Arturo looked up at his *Linguistic Coach* and nodded. "Do you want to figure out a way to say what you want to say without getting mad?" asked his *Linguistic Coach*. "Yeah," said Arturo, "I do."

The *Dialogues for Action linguistic* "dance" with Arturo began with an <u>Inquiry</u> ("Are you all right?") rather than an accusation that focused on the fact that Arturo may have yelled at or pushed someone and had left the classroom without permission. In this way a context of care and concern was demonstrated, setting the stage for establishing mutual trust and respect (i.e., <u>Set Up for a Conversation</u>). Observing Arturo watching the preschoolers, the *Linguistic Coach* used the opportunity that was presented to her to engage Arturo as another *observer* (i.e., at a *beginner Level of Learning Competence*) to *observe* what was happening between the two preschoolers on the playground (i.e., "Did you notice that…?"). In doing so, Arturo naturally left his *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* and was a *learner*, an *observer*, once again. During her *dialogue* with Arturo, she recognized one of Arturo's concerns as genuine and valid (i.e., "I bet you get disappointed in yourself…?"; <u>Acknowledgment</u>), confirmed by Arturo looking up at her and nodding. As the *Linguistic Coach* described what was happening on the preschool playground, she was actually "reframing" for Arturo what may have happened when Arturo was in the classroom (i.e., <u>Examining Assumptions</u>). When the *Linguistic Coach* asked Arturo, "Do you want to figure out a way to say what you want…?" Arturo was finally able to speak up, saying "Yeah. I do" (i.e., <u>Commitment</u>). Although Arturo said very few words in the *dialogue* process, the *Linguistic Coach observed* that Arturo was engaged in the *dialogue* when she saw Arturo's face and body posture relax. As a result, Arturo demonstrated that he was now ready to continue the *dialogue*, to further examine what had happened in the classroom (i.e., <u>Examining Assumptions</u>) and complete the *dialogue* process (i.e., *<u>Structured Choice</u>*; <u>Commitment</u>; <u>Set Up for the Next Activity or Task</u>; <u>Clearing</u>; <u>Feedback and Consequences</u>).

It is important to note that in most circumstances, comparing an adolescent's <u>actions</u> with those of preschoolers would escalate the *learning breakdown*. In this case, the *Linguistic Coach* clearly demonstrated to Arturo through her tone of voice, body language, and the words that she used (i.e., the *linguistic distinctions* she made) that Arturo was a *learner* (i.e., *observer*), *whole, able and complete, just the way he was and just the way he was not* (see the discussion of *Ontological Design* below). Moreover, the *Linguistic Coach's* observations about the preschoolers on the playground created a new learning *ecology* that naturally shifted Arturo's pervasive mood of despair and resignation (i.e., the scowl on his face, his tense posture, and his refusal to speak or his *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*), opening the possibility that Arturo and the *Linguistic Coach* could work in *partnership* as *observers* to forward effective, *coordinated action*.

Whether *learners* engage in the *Dialogues for Action* process verbally or non-verbally through their body language, we have found that *Dialogues for Action* are a key tool for assisting *learners* to identify their own *Domains of Life Concerns* (either immediate or long-term); make *grounded* versus *ungrounded*

assessments of their own *Levels of Learning Competence* in meeting those concerns; *observe* the underlying source(s) of *learning breakdowns* to turn *learning breakdowns* into learning opportunities; make appropriate *choices;* and take effective, *coordinated action*. Within this context, *Dialogues for Action* is an opportunity for *learners* to make *choices* and take *personal responsibility* for their own learning process.

The *Dialogues for Action* Chart below provides a summary of the purpose and potential *Speech Acts* for each type of *dialogue*: Inquiry; Commitment; Clearing, etc. However, presenting a *Dialogues for Action* "chart" masks the fact that engaging in the *dialogue* process is truly a "dance", not a prescriptive system to be followed. More importantly, where the *Linguistic Coach* is "coming from" is of equal if not greater importance than where the *dialogue* process is going (i.e., towards effective, *coordinated action*). As a result, the key to engaging a *learner* in an effective *dialogue* process is the *Linguistic Coach* being able to shift their own *ontology* (i.e., their underlying backgrounds of interpretation) from one that closes possibilities for learning to one that opens possibilities for learning. A detailed description of the *Dialogues for Action* process can be found in *Taking Charge® for Educators and Related Professionals: Linguistic Coaching® for Learners of <u>All</u> Abilities* (Lavelle, 2003).

Chart B
Dialogues for Action

Dialogue	Purpose	Speech Acts (offers, requests, assertions, promises)
Inquiry	Creating a context of care and concern, not blame. Setting the stage to examine the underlying assumptions/commitment in speaking and listening.	Requesting/Offering: Are you OK? How are you? Do you need support? Do you have a request?
Acknowledgement	Recognizing the learner's concern as genuine and valid.	Asserting/Requesting: Sounds like you're upset? Are you concerned about_____?
Set-Up for Conversation	Establishing a context of mutual trust, respect.	Requesting/Offering: Are you ready to talk? When you can talk to me politely, then we can talk.
Examining Assumptions	Establishing a context of mutual learning: examining concerns, assumptions, reframing, setting limits, shifting the mood by using humor, etc.	Requesting: Did you notice that ____? Have you thought about ____? What is another way to handle that?
Structured Choice	Empowering the learner to participate in the selection of alternative courses of action and consequences; empowering the learner to make effective choices.	Requesting/Offering: What are the agreements? When ____Then ____. You may ____ or ____, which do you choose to do?
Commitment	Creating mutual agreements about future action.	Asserting/Promising: You have chosen _____; will that work for you? What can you count on yourself to do? Can you keep your word? What is our agreement (repeat for clarity, understanding)?
Set-Up for the Next Task/Activity	Investigating the unforeseen and unknowable that will cause the agreement to be broken.	Requesting: What if the same thing happens again? What will you do or say if ____? Are you willing to keep your word if ____ happens?
Clearing	Establishing that the learning breakdown is complete and the learner is ready to move on to the next task/activity.	Asserting/Requesting: You have chosen ____ (repeat agreement or choice). When you finish your choice, then you can ____. Are you ready to get started?
Feedback and Consequences	Assisting the learner to evaluate the effectiveness of his or her actions.	Offering/Requesting/Asserting: You have demonstrated competence in (recovering; making an effective choice; making/keeping your agreement, etc.). As a result, you may (earn your point for recovery; participate in a preferred activity, etc.). Do you have any feedback for me? Do you have any feedback about how you think you are demonstrating competence in ____?

Ontological Design

Taking Charge® has been used in schools and organizations, at home, and in the community for over 45 years. Empowering *learners* to *observe* themselves as *learners*, capable of opening new possibilities for learning and effective, *coordinated action* actually requires the *Linguistic Coach* to reframe or shift their own underlying backgrounds of interpretation (i.e., our *Self-Narratives*) about themselves and other *learners*. Much like the fish in the fish bowl, we are not able to *observe* that we are in water. That is, we are unable to *observe* that we already have preconceived assumptions about what it means to be in the world, what it means to be special needs or at-risk, a *learner*, a teacher, a student, a therapist, a parent/caregiver, a mentor, a counselor, etc. And we often fail to recognize that these preconceived assumptions, our underlying backgrounds of interpretation, can actually interfere with our ability to view ourselves and all *learners* as *whole, able, and complete just the way we are and just the way we are not*. We are unaware that we are all *observers*, capable of opening up new possibilities for learning and taking effective, *coordinated action* for ourselves and others. Accordingly, we are unable to *observe* that all *learners* have the innate capacity to make *choices* and be *personally responsible* for their own learning process. Most importantly, often our own "acts" and our own "fears" react to the "acts" and "fears" of the *learner*, and we are both caught in the same *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*.
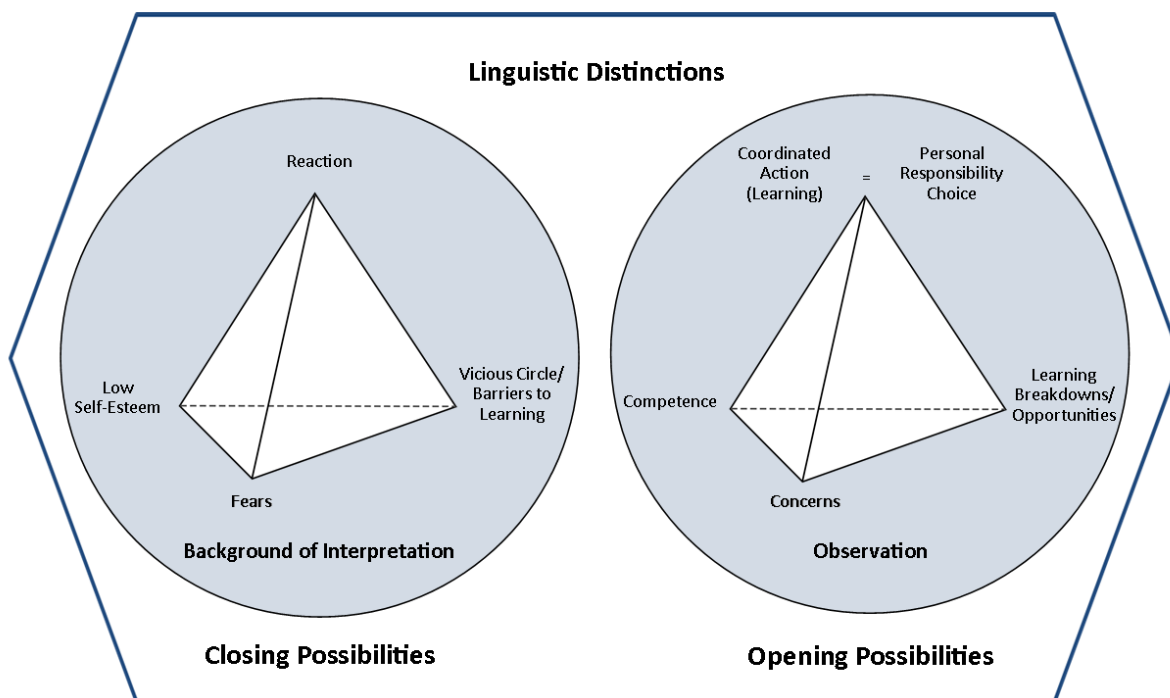
The reframing or shift required for us to step outside the fish bowl, to step outside the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative*, in which we find ourselves is called *ontological design*. Whether we are aware of it or not, our basic assumptions about being in the world (i.e., our *ontology*) evolves out of our concerns about essential questions regarding the nature of reality, time, space, truth, human nature, human activity, human relationships, the nature of the relationship between humans and the environment, etc. *Ontological design* is a conversation in which speakers and *listeners* make explicit *linguistic distinctions* regarding the nature of their being and action in the world.

Imagine a conversation in which we recognize that when something happens in our world, there are two possibilities: to react (i.e., close possibilities for learning), or to *choose* to *observe* and take effective, *coordinated action* (i.e., open possibilities for learning). In this conversation, we describe a *learner's* fears as the concerns that all humans have about developing competence in domains of action. As *learners* naturally move through *Levels of Learning Competence* in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*, we speak of turning *learning breakdowns* into learning opportunities rather than the *Vicious Circle Self-Narrative* and *barriers to learning*. Instead of having conversations about improving a *learner's* low self-esteem, we recognize that self-esteem is a function of demonstrating competence to handle one's own self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns* (and the concerns of others). As the *learner* demonstrates competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*, the *learner* can be said to be making *choices* and taking *personal responsibility* for effective, *coordinated action* (i.e., learning). Now imagine that we have unintentionally built a stable structure with a strong foundation, a tetrahedron, which holds in place a discourse that closes possibilities for learning. Rather than futilely trying to change or modify the old discourse, we have invented a new discourse, a new *ontology*, one which speaks of all *learners* as *whole, able and complete just the way they are and just the way they are not*, and capable of developing competence in self-identified *Domains of Life Concerns*. Our new tetrahedron is also stable with a strong foundation, impervious to the ups and downs of life, allowing us to transform

our discourse from one that closes possibilities for learning to one that opens possibilities for learning success. It is within this new *ontology* (i.e., the *Learner Self-Narrative*) that the *Linguistic Coach* and the *learner* can engage in conversations and *dialogues* as *observers* and as *learners*, capable of opening new possibilities for effective, *coordinated action* for themselves and others (Flores, F. & Graves, M., 1986; Lavelle, N. & Keogh, B.K., 1980; Woolfson, L., 2003).

<u>Diagram D</u>
Shifting our Ontology from Closing to Opening Possibilities for Learning

Linguistic Distinctions

Reaction

Low Self-Esteem

Vicious Circle/ Barriers to Learning

Fears

Background of Interpretation

Closing Possibilities

Coordinated Action (Learning)

Personal Responsibility Choice

Competence

Learning Breakdowns/ Opportunities

Concerns

Observation

Opening Possibilities

Conclusion

Taking Charge®, *Linguistic Coaching*®, and *Dialogues for Action* provide powerful tools for working in *partnership* with *learners* of <u>all</u> abilities to empower them to "take charge" of their own learning process. We understand that our approach is a new way of thinking, a new *ontology*, that may appear complicated at first. However, as with any new approach, practice makes perfect! We invite you to participate in one or more of our Taking Charge® in-person or online courses and programs. Or contact us about an individual or group *Linguistic Coaching*® consultation designed to meet your specific needs. Thank you for your commitment to opening possibilities for *learners* of <u>all</u> abilities to <u>act</u> effectively in the world as competent, caring, and contributing members of society. Welcome to the world of Taking Charge®!

**Working in *Partnership* with *Learners* <u>All</u> Abilities to
Empower Them to Take Charge of Their Own Learning and Lives
Nancy J. Lavelle, Ph.D.**

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