

What is Waldon ? Symposium Paper 1984

So how far can we go towards answering such a question as ... What is 'Waldon'? even when conditions are potentially auspicious?

'Waldon' is the application of some quite simple ideas to the analysis and to the encouragement of adaptive abilities in individuals.

These simple ideas attempt to define certain features of the nature of general understanding, the conditions which favour (support or foster or obstruct or distort) its growth; the changes in its form and function (with time) during normal development; and the relationship of its opportunities for expression in competition with other behaviours.

Hence the question 'What is 'Waldon'? *when asked seriously* requires the communication of these ideas to the enquirer - to someone who needs to understand - so as to actively modify that person's behaviour such that subsequently all perceptions will be examined and interpreted in the light of this changed understanding.

Since the theories themselves are to do with communication we are attempting to communicate ideas about how communication takes place! What is more, if we examine what we are doing in the light of the theories, we may well find that we have gone about trying to communicate in ways which they predict will be ineffectual. If on the other hand the student approaches the learning of the new ideas, by whatever chance, in the manner recommended by the new ideas themselves, they are much more likely to become truly cognisant of them. However, if he goes about it in ways that contradict the theory, *can he ever reach a state of understanding?*

Before proceeding further it is necessary for us to make at least a brief excursion into the nature of enquiry and of communication, which are of course dealt with much more fully in the theories underlying the approach called 'Waldon'.

The linguistic or dictionary definitions of the word 'question' are often too vague or too particular for my purpose since it is commonly difficult to distinguish between the form of the question and the state (the intention) of the enquirer.

For my purpose a questioner is one who *needs* to understand and who therefore actively and effortfully goes about attempting to understand. That is to say a *true questioner* is one who first asks the question of themselves; and a fundamental question is one which is not likely to be answered by a dictionary or an encyclopaedia.

To question is to recognise one's need to understand.

The word communication also connotes too particular a process for my liking and even specialists in communication systems often tend to assume that for all practical purposes the act of communication requires a 'sender' and a 'receiver', whereas anyone familiar with my theories will recognise that I consider the 'receiver' - or better, the receiving observer - to be the only essential participant in the act of communication.

However, although approaching the problem in a rather different way from communications engineers, I would certainly not quarrel with their notion that the essence of communication might be considered as the resolution of a state of uncertainty.

Since the process or act of observation is central to both experiencing in general and to communication, however defined, it is easy to suspect a parallel between (or as I would rather say, the identity of) the two.

Thus an observation may be seen as occurring as a temporary change in the:

State of Active Expectancy (pre-awareness) (of the notion in question)

ACTIVE SCANNING (Motivation)

This coincides with the state of active searching for fragments of pattern - any pattern in any modality- through a process of scanning, which once found induces a ...

State of Uncertainty (Drive)

APPLICATION OF GENERAL UNDERSTANDING

This coincides with a, now directed, drive towards discovering the most satisfying ways of arranging the fragments apprehended, which activity continues until is reached a ...

State of Resolution (or some degree of resolution) of that uncertainty

This resolution coincides with some degree of subsidence of the need and a tendency to return once again to the background ...

State of Active Expectancy

ACTIVE SCANNING (see diagram - PDF adjacent to this paper)

It is not necessary to analyse this process further to recognise quite clearly that, in the process of learning to understand, the onus is entirely on the learner, on their effortfully active striving to understand.

The teacher can facilitate the process, encourage a state of motivated preparedness, offer a suitable learning substrate, apply certain constraints etc., but learning to understand implies thinking, active thinking as all real

thinking must be, an effortful activity which is quite as exhausting of the emotional drive as any activity can be.

Hence our question, like all real or fundamental questions, can be truly answered only by the questioner themselves and for themselves.

Others can 'lead' the discovery to some extent, and also facilitate the process somewhat - this is what education means - but a true questioner, one who *needs* to know, must (in the long run) seek to satisfy their own need.

It is not possible to transmit *understanding* by means of words.

It is not possible to *explain* a novel fundamental concept.

So, to return to our question, 'What is 'Waldon'?

It should by now be clear that there can be no straightforward verbal answer to the question. To expect one is to mistake the nature of the communication process. *I* can only - *it is possible* only to - point in the direction, illuminate some of the pathway and indicate some of the constraining barriers; the rest is up to the enquirer.

So ... bearing these points in mind - What is 'Waldon'?

'Waldon' is the intention to encourage the growth of self reliance and independence within social and non-social conditions in (any and all) individuals by means of educational principles derived from the observed development of young children.

These observations lead to the recognition that children learn best in ways and under conditions which are often at variance with the intuitions of adults who base their actions and expectations on grown-up values and on their own parentally felt need for the children in their care.

These ideas are summed up and formulated in theories of:

Learning - comprising a description of the conditions for, and manner of, gain in experience and understanding, and of

Development - being an outline of the rules governing the form and growth of understanding.

Theories of Learning and Development

Understanding is that faculty which determines how effectively an organism learns to adapt to changing conditions.

Human understanding develops over a prolonged period and a significant proportion of the organism's life.

Human understanding consists of two components:

a *primary or general understanding* (GU) which closely resembles in form and development that of all other humans (but leads naturally to the personal, particular application of these, inviting a wide range of individuality)

and

a *secondary, largely contingent, cultural-particular understanding* (CPU) which varies greatly according to the society to which the organism belongs and reflects the ideals of the elders of that society.

Theory of Learning - 'Waldon'

The two forms of understanding are learned quite differently and under greatly differing sets of conditions.

The manner in which *general experience* is actively and selectively acquired, and subsequently becomes organised and assimilated so as to modify the general understanding; the nature and functions of *motivation*; the notions of *familiarity* in perception, and the dynamic influence of *constraint* etc; and especially the central role of the *observation* in the growth and exercise of understanding, are ingredients of the *theory of learning*.

Theory of Development - 'Waldon'

General understanding develops according to a universal pattern in which the earlier is the origin of and gives rise to the later, and the later invariably grows out from the earlier and always contains evidence of this.

The enormous acceleration to produce the necessary exponential gain required by the human organism during the preparatory period of childhood is accounted for by the several *learning-how-to-learn tools* (Waldon) which, being forged in the early years by a fairly simple process of organised accretion, effectively increase the amount, suitability and quality of the experience gained subsequently.

The remarkable ability of a child to learn so readily the complex rules of their mother tongue (conventional language) is explained by the contention that the structure and rules of *language* and of *general understanding* are identical - that fundamental language and general understanding are in fact one and the same thing.

A description of the form and changes of form of general understanding during its growth is the subject matter of the theory of development.

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Before finishing I must refer to that aspect of Waldon - of the application of the ideas to deliberate education - which is concerned with the redress of imbalance in development and with the conscious prevention of such disharmony.

Anomalies in the manner of learning or in the form and dynamics of development are discussed in terms of *primary* and *secondary impediments*, of states of *handicap* and *retardation*, and of the child's responses to such states - *handicap behaviours* and *retardation behaviours*.

Geoffrey Waldon (1984)