

How learning conversations lead to change

AN ALIVE FIELD GUIDE FOR PEOPLE LEADING
LEARNING, COMMUNICATION AND CHANGE.

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What happens after the bell rings?

At the end of school, we often ask
“What did you learn today?”

It’s a simple question, but it carries the powerful assumption
that learning happens every day.

And that it’s worth talking about.

Strangely, we don’t tend to ask the same question of adults.

Instead, at work, we talk about performance, expertise and results.
We attend training programmes and click through slides and online
modules.

At home, we talk about how the day went, what needs fixing and what
comes next.

But rarely do we ask
Did something change your mind today?
Did you see something differently?
Did a conversation happen that wouldn’t have happened before?
Did you try something new?

Learning leaves a trace.
If nothing changes,
nothing was learned.

Where did this come from?

This ALIVE field guide comes from our work with organisations, cultural institutions and educators.

We help turn ideas into experiences people can actually use - through films, workshops, programmes and facilitated conversations.

Over time, we've noticed something.

Real change rarely begins with a speech.

It begins with a moment of recognition.

A conversation.

And a small step someone feels able to try.

Culture changes when people begin to see something differently and talk about it together.

Conversation is thinking
out loud together.

From training to learning

Many organisations invest heavily in training.

Courses are designed.

Platforms are launched.

Content is delivered.

The assumption is:

if people understand the information

they will apply it.

But training and learning are not the same thing.

Training focuses on delivery.

Learning shows up as change.

Training asks

Did people complete the course?

Learning asks

Did anything change?

Learning is visible in conversations, decisions and actions.

Training delivers content.
Learning creates change.

We don't suffer from a lack of information.

If anything, the opposite is true.

We are surrounded by more information than we can reasonably process.
What is often missing is the chance to talk about what it actually means.

Learning begins when people start asking

What does this mean for me?

What does this mean for us?

What might we try next?

Those questions only appear when information becomes conversation.

Learning happens in conversation.

Learning is change. Change is learning.

Learning design helps people see something differently
so they can do something differently.

A different decision.

A different conversation.

A different way of seeing a situation.

Sometimes learning changes behaviour. Sometimes it changes a question,
an assumption or what someone notices next.

And yet, we often try to create learning using the same tools we use to
share information. We explain. We instruct. We simplify.

People are more likely to change when they

- recognise themselves or their reality in what they see
- feel an emotional response that makes the moment real
- understand what it means for their own work, relationships or
view of the world
- have the opportunity to talk it through with others

Most importantly, they need a small next step they can try straight away,
so change feels possible rather than overwhelming.

Learning begins when
explanation ends.

Make conversation ALIVE

Creating an opportunity to talk is not enough. A learning conversation needs people to question, listen, make sense of different perspectives and explore what might happen next.

ALIVE brings together five overlapping skills that help turn conversation into learning: Ask, Listen, Interpret, Validate and Explore.

Ask

Use questions that help people examine the idea, rather than guess the "right" answer.

Listen

Give attention to what others are saying before preparing a response.

Interpret

Notice patterns, assumptions, differences and what may be missing.

Validate

Acknowledge contributions, questions and concerns without having to agree with everything said.

Explore

Consider alternatives, test possibilities and identify next steps.

Designing conversation

When planning a workshop, class, or learning experience, it helps to think about the conditions that make conversation possible.

These design questions can help turn information into a learning conversation:

What will people recognise?

A story, scenario or situation that feels familiar.

What might they feel?

Curiosity, tension, surprise, discomfort, hope.

Emotion makes the learning real.

Why will it matter to them?

Something that connects directly to their work or lives.

What might they talk about?

Questions that invite different perspectives.

What might they try next?

A next step that feels possible.

Small talk happens naturally.
Learning conversations are designed.

Without facilitation, the loudest voices win.

Questions start conversations. ALIVE helps make them work.

Ask

Invite different perspectives rather than looking for one correct response. Notice who has not yet had the opportunity to contribute. Some people think aloud, while others need time to reflect.

Listen

Give your full attention to the person speaking. Try to understand their point before preparing your response. Briefly summarise or paraphrase what you have heard to check your understanding and show that each contribution matters.

Interpret

Explore what people mean, not only the words they use. When everyone agrees too quickly, learning can stop. Help participants question assumptions and consider why people may see the same situation differently.

Validate

Acknowledge each contribution without requiring everyone to agree. People vary in confidence and communication style. Help create conditions in which people can contribute and feel that their perspective has been heard.

Explore

Turn discussion into possible action. Speak plainly and avoid unnecessary jargon. Invite participants to consider what they might try, test or do.

Learning needs conversation.
Conversation needs facilitation.

Don't waste time together.

Time together is increasingly rare.

People spend most of their time working individually -
reviewing documents, answering messages, and navigating information.

When people do come together, something different becomes possible.

They can compare experiences.

Test ideas.

Challenge assumptions.

Make sense of complex situations together.

Shared time is one of the most valuable learning resources.

It shouldn't be used to deliver information.

It should be used to create learning conversations.

Information can travel alone.
Learning needs people together.

Ditch the meeting. Run a workshop.

A workshop begins with a different assumption.

People are not there to receive information.

They are there to make sense of something together.

Don't elect a chair, elect a facilitator. Someone to introduce a situation, a question, or a problem and ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute. Something people recognise.

Something worth talking about.

From there, conversation does the work.

People compare experiences.

Notice patterns.

Challenge assumptions.

And begin to imagine what they might try next.

Good learning conversations rarely happen by accident.

The facilitator's role is to create the conditions in which everyone can contribute.

Meetings deliver updates.
Workshops create learning.

Flip the room.

In many classrooms and training sessions, the structure is familiar.

The educator introduces and explains.

Learners listen, take notes and respond.

Information moves through the room at a pace
largely set by the person teaching.

Try moving from explanation to exploration.

The educator's role becomes both lecturer and learning coach.

Someone who introduces the challenge, guides the conversation,
and helps learners notice what they are discovering.

The room becomes noisier.

Learners speak.

The teacher listens.

The sound of learning
is conversation.

Your creative partner.

At Toffee Hammer, we design learning experiences that help ideas become conversations that lead to action. This can take many forms.

An organisation may have something important it wants people to understand - about leadership, culture, collaboration or change. But explaining the idea isn't enough. People need to see what it looks like in real life, recognise themselves in the situation, and talk about what they might do differently.

A public-facing body - such as a museum, archive or cultural institution - may have important material to share. The challenge is rarely presenting the information. It is creating something that invites curiosity and discussion.

Educators may be introducing a subject that feels difficult to teach, or looking for new ways to connect with learners who have not been reached by traditional approaches. The question becomes the same: how do you create a moment that captures attention and invites people into conversation?

That is where learning design matters: choosing the right stories, questions, experiences and next steps, so people do not just receive information - they can do something differently because of it.

What happens next?

We design experiences where these learning conversations can happen.

Workshops.

Films and stories that open discussion.

Learning programmes built around reflection and action.

ALIVE helps people move from passive to active learning through:

Asking, Listening, Interpreting, Validating and Exploring.

If you need to turn ideas into learning that people talk about - and act on -
we'd be glad to start a conversation.

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