

A ‘Developmental Action Inquiry’ Approach To Teaching First-, Second-, and Third-Person Action Research Methods

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A chapter for
Esbjörn-Hargens et al. (Ed.s)
Integral Education

In this chapter, we argue that it is only through processes such as those enacted by developmental action inquiry (DAI) (Torbert, 1976, 1987, 1991; Torbert & Associates, 2004) that education and work can be experienced as truly integral. In support of this assertion, the introductory section offers, first, brief descriptions of three integral qualities of DAI not discussed by other developmental approaches (e.g. Kegan, 1994; Wilber 2000); second, we suggest the sources of these three qualities by summarizing Bill (Torbert)’s earlier career of spiritual, educational, and managerial research, teaching, consulting, and leadership in integral education contexts. Then, in the main body of the chapter, we introduce Bill and Erica (Steckler Rosen)’s work together as teacher and student in a PhD-level course in Action Research Methods (ARM). We offer a close description of a few events that occurred during the course that reflect how an action inquiry approach can generate individual, group, and organizational learning and transformational development.

The three qualities of integral theory, personal practice, and educational organizing not enacted by other versions of developmental theory, but essential to the praxis of DAI are:

- 1) playful *first-person efforts to expand and deepen one's attention to encompass four "territories of experience"* (Torbert, 1972) and to establish alignment or integrity among them (in contrast to Wilber's Flat Four quadrants, these Deep Four territories constitute the full aesthetic continuum of the attention: its apprehension of *the outside world*, of the living being's *own embodiment and performance*, of our *feeling/interpreting/strategizing*, and of the quality and *source of attention ipse*)
- 2) leaderly *second-person initiatives to create communities of inquiry* where the individual members and the community as a whole are guided, not just by single-loop, incremental feedback, but also by double-loop, transforming feedback (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Argyris, Putnam & Smith, 1985) and by triple-loop presencing and re-aligning feedback (Senge et al, 2004; Scharmer, 2007); and
- 3) *liberating third-person disciplines* (Torbert, 1991) that sponsor the interweaving in everyday life of first-, second-, and third-person action inquiries (the long-term, fundamental purposes of each of which is, respectively, integrity, mutuality, and transformational sustainability).

The main body of this chapter about the Action Research Methods PhD course will illustrate in detail how first-, second-, and third-person action and inquiry can interweave to generate single-, double-, and triple-loop feedback that aligns the four

territories of experience in real-time to help participants increasingly develop and integrate skills, capacities, and awarenesses as both researchers and leaders, which can in turn transform the given organization (in this case the PhD course in ARM) beyond a typical ‘community of practice’ toward a true ‘community of inquiry.’

In order to give these extremely abstract concepts a little initial embodiment, we begin by tracing briefly the wide variety of organizational settings in which Bill Torbert first learned and later guided significant attempts **at integrating learning, productivity and transformational development in education and business.** Starting in early adulthood, Bill’s most significant learning organizations included:

- 1) the first-person research/practices of the Gurdjieff Work (Ouspensky, 1949)
(in which he participated from 1964 – 1989), where he studied the interplay among his perceptions of the outside world, his bodily sensations as he acted, and his emotions and thinking, all through cultivating a trans-cognitive attention; along with
- 2) the second-person research/practices of various group dynamics approaches (Tavistock, Bethel, Esalen), where he studied how one’s own speaking and timing and leadership action can help shape the vision, strategies, norms, and levels of trust and inquiry of teams one is working or partying with; and
- 3) the third-person research/practices of social science in the Yale PhD program in Individual and Organizational behavior, where he studied how quantitative, qualitative, and action research can interweave to help larger organizations and institutions transform.

Torbert's practical educational experiments in generating integral education for others as well as himself include:

- 1) his directorship of the Yale Upward Bound War on Poverty program for high school students (1966-68) (Torbert, 1976), which cut New Haven's high school drop-out rate in half;
- 2) his creation of an action-and-reflection-oriented entrepreneurial course for 400 undergraduate students at a time at the Southern Methodist University Business School (1970-72) and for 100+ graduate students at a time at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (1972-76) (Torbert, 1991) (during these years he won an Outstanding Professor award and gradually created and defined "liberating disciplines," a kind of organizing that simultaneously supports and challenges participants and the organization as a whole to develop toward becoming a true community of inquiry);
- 3) his role as founder and director of the Theatre of Inquiry (1977-78) (Torbert, 1989), when he learned the alchemy of creating something out of nothing;
- 4) his deanship of the Boston College MBA program, where his focus shifted to institutionalizing (sustaining) a transformational program within a relatively conservative, conventional university (Torbert, 1987) (during these years the BC MBA program jumped from below the top 100 to #25);
- 5) his long-term consulting roles aimed at generating both personal and organizational developmental transformation in business and not-for-profit settings (Fisher & Torbert, 1995; Torbert & Associates, 2004; Rooke & Torbert, 2005), when he learned much more about the developmental

timing of interventions meant to influence others' first-, second-, and third-person action inquiry; and, finally,

- 6) his efforts to generate a PhD course in Action Research Methods that simultaneously supports students' intellectual, experiential, and practical development and that becomes a model for how to do so.

(This brief review of Bill's career emphasizes indices of success, not stumbles and incongruities, in order to give the reader some sense that developmental action inquiry and conventional successes are compatible. However, stumbles and the recognition of significant incongruities are also inevitable aspects of the action inquiry path and are richly illustrated in his semi-autobiographical books (Torbert, 1976, 1991) and summed up in the metaphor: "Confusion and the will-I-am to listen through such confusions are the two legs of my gait of power. I call their stumbling gait 'living inquiry' (Torbert, 1991, p279).")

The Action Research Methods Course

Bill has been teaching the Action Research Methods course to doctoral candidates in Boston College's Organization Studies Department for ten years. It is one of a small handful of action research courses taught in the U.S. In his capacity as professor, Bill strives to facilitate and inspire the building and ever-evolving reconstruction of liberating disciplines through individual and group discussion, exercises, and assignments. In contrast to more conventional educational settings, Bill designs the course to enable leadership – both voluntary and assigned, or organic and defined, leader(s) – to become immersed in a creative learning space traditionally reserved for student followers. In

addition, personal, interpersonal, and organizational development become intentionally inter-independent (McGuire, Palus & Torbert, 2007) with the group in Bill's action inquiry class context, as students and leaders stumble across learning challenges and opportunities that can cross-pollinate and transform the "I", "We," "It," and "Its" quadrants referred to in integral education (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2007) in real time.

Erica took the ARM class as a requirement of the first year of her doctoral study. She had known very little about the course or the method prior to reading the syllabus on the first day of class. Ultimately much of the method resonated with Erica, who has appreciated the integration of multiple experiential dimensions including awareness, inquiry, reflection, action, testing, expression, effectiveness, and learning enacted in the present, individually and with others, with a transformational intention. She found herself creatively and developmentally inspired by the first, second, and third person research practices that she developed over the semester, and volunteered to co-author this chapter thereafter.

Because the course includes autobiographical writing, audio-recordings and selected transcriptions of class meetings, as well as individual and group-oriented study and reflection by students and leaders as it proceeds, it is possible to convey in up-close detail what this embodiment of integral education involves in particular instances. The course experience we highlight in this chapter involves fewer than ten participants, including BC members required to take the course and members from neighboring universities electing to take the course.

The syllabus for the ARM course is arranged in four subsections – Mission, Strategies, Practices, and Assessments – that reflect key actionable components of this

research method. It begins with the following fourfold statement of Mission “(as pre-formulated by the professor; how does it ring to you?)”:

- I. Wonder-full listening***
- II. Presencing theorizing***
- III. Timely, transforming acting, and***
- IV. Mutually inquiring and empowering researching/assessing
of validity, efficacy, integrity, mutuality, sustainability, and justice***

We immediately note that this mission sounds slightly mysterious, as well as somewhat more experiential and action-oriented than a typical course mission. As we discussed at our first meeting in mid-January, an overarching goal of this course is to introduce us to, and co-create a space to practice together, a theory that makes us more aware of our attention, thinking, and action, and the integration of all of these with the world around us. Further, we talked about how the goal of Bill’s theory of action inquiry is to enable us to find and enact truths that are operative and functional at a given point or points in time (Erica’s class notes). Following more clarifying discussion we apparently converged around accepting Bill’s pre-formulated mission.

In the next section of the syllabus, Strategies, the first strategy is entitled “Treating the class as a real-time research/practice process” and describes how every class will be recorded, with participant-leaders taking turns partially transcribing as well as leading a meeting, and writing a 2nd-person research paper about that meeting and the ones leading up to it, to be shared and discussed with all the other participants. The second strategy is entitled “Confidentiality, transparency, and accountability” and includes never identifying any other member of the course in any recounting of course events with persons who are not course members. This rule also applies to members of the course who may later choose to write about it for publication, and these members are

asked to share a draft of the paper with other course members prior to publication. This strategy is in effect in this chapter – members are not identified in recounting events and are instead referred to by pseudonyms. The third strategy describes the regular “Activities outside class time,” including the three papers to be written during the semester: the autobiographical, first-person paper about each participant’s developmental evolution up to the present, with next steps; the second-person paper about the class meetings, already described; and, at the end of the semester, a third-person paper about this kind of research that can potentially be published (see, for example, Hartwell & Torbert, 1999a&b; Chandler & Torbert, 2003).”

The section of the syllabus on Practices gives the weekly schedule of readings, with the final weeks of assignments blank, in anticipation of co-structuring the assignments by then. The Assessments section of the syllabus says there will be a grade for each of the three papers given by the instructor (25% each), a participation grade developed so as to provide feedback to each participant about others’ assessments (25%), and the opportunity for members to challenge and re-construct the grading process as a whole, if they wish. Our class ultimately opted not to re-construct the grading process, although there was brief discussion about how we might and if other classes had. Finally, a bibliography of major contemporary volumes related to action research is appended to the syllabus, including the following: Argyris, 1971; Bernstein, 1985; Habermas, 1984, 1987; Badiou, 1988; Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991; Wilber, 1998; Sherman & Torbert, 2000; Ogilvy, 2002; Lundberg & Young, 2005; Shani et al., 2007; Scharmer, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008.

As the syllabus is reviewed and discussed during the first meeting, course members quickly become aware that they will play a number of risk-taking, leadership roles in the class, including: 1) writing and analyzing their autobiographies early in the semester (to be shared only with the instructor, unless a given student later chooses to share with others); 2) leading at least one class each after the instructor leads the first two; and 3) writing second-person papers about the class they lead, to be shared with and discussed with the rest of the class the week afterwards. The instructor suggests a ten page minimum for the autobiography and some papers are as short as 15 or 20 pages, but most students write far longer, from 30 to 200 pages.

The following opening paragraphs of one such autobiography provide a flavor of the openness and intimacy with which students write in their first-person voices:

This is a start, just a start, at my own venture and musings of what I know and remember and what I'd like to know and explore. I have chosen "Dakota - handwriting" as the font in this endeavor because it feels more personal, and enables me to more readily step outside of the canonical Times New Roman domain of what I experience to be the serious, normative, and more confined traditions of social science, academia, and publishing. In fact, my handwriting bears little resemblance to Dakota - handwriting, and this too may serve a purpose. I hope to return to this writing effort as a reader with a framework that is inquiring and gentle. I'm not sure if I would as readily approach my own handwritten journey with as much willingness to dwell in the meanings, or ability to express understanding, forgiveness, or criticism.

My own handwriting is prettier, with big loopy g's and y's, and intentional connectivity among letters, lines, and spaces. It tends to flow more vertically, unless I am writing in Russian, where it takes on the standardized cursive slant and near-exact dimensions of every other Russian student, teacher, correspondent and friend I have known. It also tilts toward a horizontal that is closer to this font when I am rushing, taking notes at meetings and lectures, or making lists. When I am tired or

racing to scratch equations and their meanings from a chalkboard, my writing gets bigger, with more spaces in between the words and lines.

I modeled my handwriting after my mother's looping and overlapping letters - I remember tracing [her signature] over and over again when I was very young, pretending that I was signing her check with bold, swirling letters. Our handwriting remains quite similar, at least as judged by people outside of our family. Her's is more elegant and creative, more practiced and attentive, more exaggerated, and maybe a little harder to read. But for me, as I imagine it must be for others, it is always an indulgence to feel the joy, attention, and love in her notes and cards through both the message and each and every curling, original letter inscribed on the paper and envelope.

My handwriting is tighter, more controlled, but still natural, creative, and nice to read. Friends and family tend to appreciate and enjoy my handwriting, maybe because it is different, modeled as it is after my mother's unique signature. Maybe they comment because it is the message within the loops that resonates. Aside from requisite thank-you's, I have always loved connecting with people through writing. (Writing thank-you notes can also be a quiet pleasure, but my recent wedding experience has been a bit of a thank-you burnout with over 250 guests and their presence, and generosity to acknowledge...). I credit my mother for sharing her handwriting with me, and also for my growing into this love of writing, which I have come back to and left, again and again, over 32 years.

This kind of first-person research and expression in developmental action inquiry tracks quite well to the Interior-Individual , or “I,” quadrant of the Integral model of education (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2007), tapping into the self and consciousness through awareness, contemplation, and critical reflection on personal and interpersonal experiences. After course participants write an initial story-draft of their life, the instructor offers detailed written feedback, including questions about how different life events may suggest certain developmental action-logics or moments of transformation between action-logics (Torbert & Fisher, 1992). Understanding how a difficult time in one's life (or a difficult

theme, such as inclusion or power or intimacy) may have represented a conflict between action-logics can lead to a deepening self-acceptance, as well as to more active inquiry and greater openness to whatever one's own and others' current transforming edge is. Thus, this first-person paper tends to become much more than an exercise in using case study data to test a theory. If there is sufficient trust between the instructor and the participant, and if the participant takes sufficient initiative, the participant can use the rest of the course as a primary site for experimenting toward enacting a personal double-loop, action-logic transformation.

The developmental action inquiry approach to teaching and action researching also embodies an integral theory of education through second- and third-person research methods. The remainder of this chapter will focus on three separate incidents that the participants' highlight the transformational processes and effects of second-person research in the "We/You" quadrant of a truly integral education. First, we will share how our group stumbled on a learning moment related to how membership commitment, inclusion, and in-group/out-group norms can develop in a community of inquiry. Next, we highlight an early example and observation of power and control in order to show how a community of inquiry depends on a movement from more centralized, unilateral, institutional sources of power to more distributed, more mutual, and more communal sources of power. Finally, we explore a double-loop feedback interaction that deals with the issue of between-member conflict and intimacy. All three of these incidents arise from a growing and shared awareness of the "I," as framed by integral education, and illustrate the transformational potential of developmental action inquiry as a second-

person research method converges on the “You/We,” “It,” and to some extent the “Its” quadrants of integral educational (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2007).

Incident I – Inclusion: The Volunteers vs. the Draftees

On the day when he took the lead in generating the class agenda and guiding the class meeting, Bob (all names except our own are pseudonyms) invited us to explore ideas of membership and commitment to our evolving community of inquiry, based on an exchange in an earlier class between himself, who was studying at another area university and had elected the course, and Jim, who was a BC PhD student. Bob had been “inviting” Jim to participate more fully, trying to demonstrate the advantages of engaging in a deeper inquiry together, in line with becoming “a community of inquiry.” But Jim had resisted “buying in,” generating a sense of tension between the two. In this class, Bob was again raising the issue, but this time with the aim of understanding “where we want to go forward as a group.”

Jim: *First of all, just some background here. Bob and Sue, you are volunteers for this class. You are here because this is something you want to learn. You think this is something important. I am a draftee. I'm here because they will not give me a Ph.D., unless I pass this class and pass the comprehensive exam. It is not a course that I would decide to take otherwise. It's not something that I think should be a requirement, but it is. And I have this feeling that because of the nature of this action research course and how you're supposed to participate here and write your papers that I'm sort of in a position having to hand over a part of my life that I do not want to hand over in order to do well...*

...(and) I was being asked sequentially by the three people who felt the most empowered by this (Bob, Sue, and Bill T.) to justify myself. And I was the person who felt the least empowered and who was sort of being offered the role of this anti-action research guy in the class. And that bothered me a lot...

... And so I left class and I thought about it too much and I got kind of freaked out about it. It all boils down to I felt like I was being singled out. And so I guess my question here is, and this maybe my learning goal, is that given all the things I said about my connection and disconnection from the class, how am I supposed to participate in the full

transparent level that everything I read in this class tells me I'm suppose to participate in. You know, not hurt the group by being withdrawn from it or anything like that.

Instructor: *Well, one of things that struck me is that you don't affect me as the least participative person in class and in fact, you repeatedly raise significant issues. And here you are now sort of whole-heartedly entering into this and sharing what you actually felt between classes. So I don't feel like it's necessary to coerce you to do anything more. In fact, one of the things that strikes me when I think about it is, gosh, you've been present in several different ways, somewhat critically. If we cannot accept a critical voice in here, then we are really in trouble as far as creating a community of inquiry is concerned. So, I don't know. I mean, I don't myself experience you as required to do more.*

Bob: *On that point, first I'm really grateful that you share this. I'm asking myself why did I go back again. You said you felt irritated. And maybe I have the sense that I know better and am therefore trying to ask you what is your problem, what is it that you're not getting here. I'm questioning myself whether I have that frame. Maybe I... maybe I do. [Pause]*

Sue: *I really appreciate this discussion, because I think a lot of what we've been talking about is the difference between our intention and the impact we are actually having on the group. We've just heard all these different perspectives. From you, Bob, on what your intention is and you are getting some feedback in various ways about the impact you're actually having. And you are just talking about a particular intention you are coming from. But it had a certain kind of impact.*

In his second-person paper, Bob offers a careful analysis of his *intended results* when he had originally been speaking with Jim, of the *actual impact* he had on Jim, of his own *specific actions*, of his *actual frames (or assumptions)* that generated his actions, and then of *future frames* and *desired actions*. At the conclusion of the paper, Bob summarizes his central insights into the *actual frames* he had been operating from in the original conversation:

This session has had a profound impact on me personally. I have learned to see many blind-spots I was not aware of until now and have transcended single-loop thinking into double-loop thinking. I really appreciate that Jim put himself out to share with us how he really felt in class. Before that, I believed religiously that action inquiry must be good for all, and had no idea of the kind of coercive effect the group can have on people, (mostly generated by me) and the potential damage that comes with it. My prior single-loop

thinking included believing single-mindedly in the benefits of a community of inquiry (COI) without questioning its potential harm to people. I never questioned the goal of creating a COI (the why), I was only concerned about how to create it. When I saw a member not benefiting from it as much, I mistakenly thought it must be his fault and that only if I can help him to see its value, will he enjoy it and learn from it as much as I do. This is typical single-loop thinking where I try to influence people's behavior in order to achieve a fixed goal.

We can see that although Bob had originally imagined that Jim required a double-loop change of perspective (or frame or assumptions), it is Bob himself who ultimately recognizes that his perspective or frame calls for a double-loop change, if he is in fact going to be an effective agent of a community of inquiry. The norms of a community of inquiry cannot be established by fiat – by implicitly hierarchical, dualistic thinking and acting, which can only result in unquestioned norms, declining trust, and unmanageable conflict – but only by a vulnerable, dialectical self-disclosing inquiry process that Jim is in fact the first to model in the interactions we have just reviewed, and that Bob then enacts in his second-person research paper. More generally, there is no mechanical, general way of creating a community of inquiry; it must be constructed from the materials and limitations of each distinct situation by an increasingly conscious, skillful, and, above all, truly mutual action inquiry process among the participants.

Control: The Instructor vs. the Students

The incident we highlight next deals with an observation of an initial power dynamic that one of the members of this evolving community of inquiry brought our attention to in a second-person research paper, informed by transcription of an audio recording of class, as well as jotted class and journal notes during the two weeks leading up to the paper. The budding research/practitioner tried “...to be aware of not just *what* people were saying, but *how* they were saying things.” The particular issue of control

was raised in terms of describing the actual physical setting for one particular class. It was one of the first moves by a student to confront, albeit indirectly, issues of institutionalized power and control, and it opened the doors for further inquiry and mutuality-building among our members. In particular, the question is to what degree is the instructor genuinely sharing control of the class as a whole and to what degree is he actually exerting as much or more unilateral power than a typical professor.

Consistent with the principles of action inquiry that help cultivate single, double and triple-loop feedback (Torbert, 2004), this section is structured by Erica, with opportunity for Bill to respond. This example of inquiry-in-action is also consistent with a key assumption of integral theory that multiple ways of knowing occur through participatory relationships and a variety of inquiry methods (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2007).

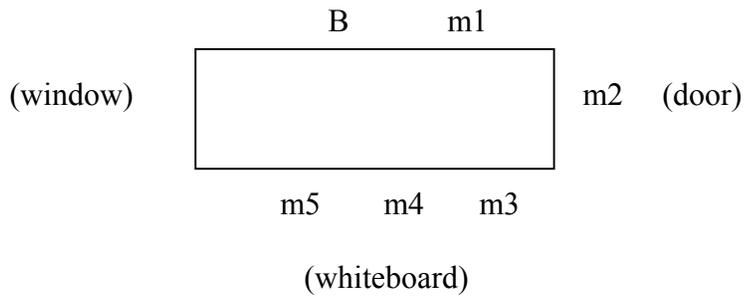
The student-researcher's statement of intention at the outset of this second-person paper reads:

My goal for observing, listening, and assessing our... class session is to discover moments and spaces of group development and challenges, and to explore these together as we pursue our shared commitment to mutual, empowering learning and transformational growth in our group research.

The following excerpt and seating chart provide the basis for class consideration of (and now readers' attention to) the power and control dynamic within this potential community of inquiry.

...Bill typically indicates available and desirable seating positions by placing piles of handouts in particular locations. It seems like Bill's intent is to get us into a more circular and less-dispersed configuration. Although I now expect these piles of handouts that indicate a preferred seating configuration, this imposed structure has felt a little suspect to me, a little off-putting, given the relatively free-sit norms that have emerged in my other classes. I do see the value in closer seating arrangements, and any initial reaction has so far subsided immediately once discussion gets under way.

Seating Arrangement



Note: member notations: B = Bill; m1 = member 1; m2 = member 2; etc. are unrelated to previous designations in this chapter.

As a result of the timely sharing of this observation with the group, our awareness shifted to consider the application of status-based power, or institutionalized control, in terms of a preferred seating schema imposed by someone who arguably should be an equal-status participant. Upon reflection, the irony of the presence of a “legitimate” leader, in this case one who is institutionally appointed, in a transformationally oriented self-study group that is explicitly modeled after a peer-like community of inquiry cannot be ignored. While each member agreed, to one extent or another, to play at this task of creating a community of inquiry in which mutuality, integrity, and sustainability are expected outcomes of the process, Bill’s presence as professor-expert-evaluator – in addition to the requirement for several of us to take the course – makes it easy to interpret our gatherings for learning and development as fundamentally coerced, which undermines the voluntariness, mutuality, and trust at the very core of a community of inquiry. What if one of us had resisted or refused to sit in front of one of the piles of articles that Bill placed neatly at desirable seating locations around the table? Most likely, Bill would have noticed early on in the class and asked us to move back into his ideal, tightly

configured arrangement. I'm not sure that any of us would have challenged his subtle but obvious authority in the classroom, and therefore in our community, in that event.

Another facet of the challenge of power is that even when the opportunity to share power is offered, as when Bill offered the opportunity to revise the suggested grading process, it is not always accepted in whole or even in part, as when the group did not suggest or pursue changes in the assessment system. Further, no one challenged the fact that this course met for one extra hour each week than other comparable 3-credit classes (and had been doing so throughout its history). In fact, **despite awareness and discussion of the seating pattern generated by the instructor's initiative, the pattern did not change very much thereafter.**

The important implication here is that even if Bill is not exercising control, there may be manipulative elements from the simple fact of his position of authority that ultimately have retrogressive effects. Although student-members became more empowered over the semester – manifest in more generative and collaborative development of the class-to-class agendas, with increasing numbers of the topics discussed influenced by what the student-researchers chose to focus on in their second-person research papers, and later in choosing readings for the last several class meetings – Bill's leadership of the class remained something that we all negotiated to find an appropriate, palatable balance between unilateral and mutual control.

Here begins Bill's rejoinder on this critical issue of power and control in a group that is convening to some degree because of members' pre-defined institutional roles, status, and legitimate power and to some degree because of their dedication to becoming a more mutual community of inquiry in which the very issue of what kind of power is

being exercised how and by whom becomes discussable and transformable. First, as Erica's prior comments indicate, I did share power with the class in a variety of ways and offered to share power in even more ways than the class took up. Second, I did not hesitate to exercise power myself (for I wished us to become mutually empowered, not mutually unempowered), and my intent when exercising power was to create conditions for increasingly mutual exercises of power. Third and as an example of the prior point, with regard to my initiatives to influence the seating arrangement, I had only two motives that I was and am aware of: 1) I wished to model the fact that a meeting leader can influence the quality of the meeting by considering the physical arrangements as well as by planning the intellectual and emotional discussion topics and research exercises (and I hoped that the student meeting leaders, either through implicit mimicry or through explicit discussion, would gradually choose to exercise such power as well); and 2) in the early sessions, I wished to seat myself more on the edge of the group than in the center (as the seating chart shows), in order to make it easier for the conversation *not* to focus around me. Fourth, when Erica speculates that if a member of the group had contested my seating suggestions I would likely have "asked (them) to move back into (my) ideal, tightly configured arrangement," I am quite confident she is wrong, given the motives I've just described. Instead, I would want to use the contestation over my "power move" to increase our ongoing awareness of the power issues at stake and whether each such exercise of power increases or diminishes trust, mutuality, and inquiry.

Returning to a joint authorial voice, we agree that, although one can offer some general answers to the question of how power is generated and used to create a community of inquiry, none of these general answers are of any use if the actors in the

specific group are not awake to the “dance of power” being enacted whenever the group is meeting. In general, groups are initially constituted by a larger organization based on some taken-for-granted pre-definitions of mission, membership, roles, and power-distribution. Under such circumstances, power is likely to be hierarchically distributed and exercised in a relatively unilateral, uninquiring fashion. Subordinate members may passively accept their relatively dependent, low power roles, or may passive-aggressively express counter-dependent de-commitment while remaining official group members. The official leadership may either defend its unilateral power and punish expressions of creative, independent power, or it may use its power to support low-power members to act with increasing independence (as we believe Bill did when he supported Jim’s role as an active critic of the group purpose and process). No one can unilaterally transform anyone else from dependence through counter-dependence and independence to inter-dependence.

In action inquiry, an important practice is to observe when and how power is being exercised. Doing so creates a space for reflection and potential double and triple loop learning whereby the exercise of power becomes increasingly mutual. A full-fledged peer community of inquiry can evolve only gradually through making the difficult issues of membership, power, and intimacy discussible and transformable. Over the ten years of the Action Research Methods course, about half the students have chosen voluntarily to create small action inquiry groups the following year, and some of these continued meeting for many years. In effect, because the course is required of some of its participants, a full-fledged community of inquiry is likely to evolve only after the formal conclusion of the course. To conclude this discussion of the exercise of power in the

ARM course, we believe that second-person research in the midst of practice in the present that makes the actual power relationships in the setting discussible and transformable is a *sine qua non* of truly integral education that supports human and organizational development beyond dependence and independence to inter-independence.

Intimacy/ feedback/ transformation issue

The third set of incidents from the ARM class that we focus on concern issues of feedback and intimacy among the members. Nadine, one of the “draftees,” had shifted from a low participation mode after a class in which she presented a difficult conversation between her and one of her apartment-mates. She was unquestioningly clear that the difficulties were caused by the apartment-mate, until another member of the class pointed out succinctly how she was acting toward the apartment-mate in precisely the same way as she was complaining her apartment-mate was acting toward her. Immediately thunderstruck by the truth of this critique, Nadine reported the following week that she had excised the tension and transformed the relationship the evening after the class session.

This experience led Nadine to experiment with more direct feedback to every other class member in her second-person research paper a few weeks later (and both experiences led her to write a third-person paper about the kind of experiences that can transform a person from feeling like a draftee to feeling like a volunteer). In particular, she shared her own personal observations and reflections about the personal learning goals for the rest of the course that other members of our community had expressed in the prior session. Sue felt negatively evaluated by Nadine’s comments related to the personal

goals that Sue had shared with the group. The following excerpts are from a series of emails that were made public in our class, and that eventually precipitated a conflict-confrontation exercise that Bill suggested and facilitated.

*“Hi Everyone,
Please find my second person paper attached... I hope you will find it useful – I have made a lot of assumptions in my analysis of our conversation and I hope it will be taken in the spirit intended -- to be helpful and constructive and to generate further discussion.
Looking fwd to see you all on Wednesday!!
Best,
Nadine”*

*“Hey Nadine,
Your analysis generally made me feel misunderstood and the object of unfounded assumptions/projections, which makes it less safe to share things like personal goals in the first place...”*

Sue goes on over the course of two or so pages to identify specific problematic clauses and assumptions from Nadine’s second person paper, and responds to each of these by clarifying what the actual intentions and assumptions guiding these goals actually were. She evaluates Nadine’s feedback as “unskillful,” requests that Nadine approach observation and reflection with more “curiosity and generosity” and fewer “meandering assumptions.” And closes this email with an invitation to discuss the issues with Nadine further.

Nadine responds:

*“Hi [Sue],
I must admit I was a little surprised at your email. Honestly, I didn’t mean to be overly harsh...If you don’t feel that what I wrote was representative of your motives, then you are totally free to disregard my comments! Seriously, it’s fine. But, I’m sure it would be an interesting topic to discuss in class tomorrow...you can surely use that forum to make yourself more understood...clearly what I took away from our talk is not the message you sent/intended.*

In any case, you are totally right that I could have been more curious and generous about my assumptions. Guess it's a learning process."

Sue responds:

*"Hi [Nadine],
I'm sure you didn't mean to be harsh, but what you said did come across (at least to me) as you engaged in your own private exercise of projecting motivations or assumptions onto me. And that's what I'm objecting to. Of course, as you point out, I am free to disregard your comments. But that doesn't seem to me to be a helpful way to think about this because it doesn't address the fact that your comments have an impact – both on me personally and on how you come across to me."*

Sue closes this final email by agreeing that the topic would be interesting to discuss in class, and asks permission of Nadine bring the email exchange to class the next day.

When this email interaction is presented to the class, Bill suggests a possible "liberating discipline" that he calls an "angel" exercise, whereby Nadine and Sue can talk about their conflict in the class, with two other members serving as "angels" for each. The "angels" can speak as Nadine or Sue over their shoulders, in an effort to get at underlying issues and perhaps diffuse some of the one-on-one personal tension. He says "Let's just see if the class is interested by this, and it seems that it might make it a more complete challenge for [our community of inquiry]." We all agree to participate, and Nadine and Sue are each allocated two other members of class to act as their voices in dialog. This has the dual-effect of immediately depersonalizing the issues and engaging all of us in the transformational task of moving beyond where two of our members, and therefore our group as a whole, have gotten stuck. Finally, as a result of Nadine's second person paper, the email exchanges, and the confrontation and feedback exercise we do in class, Sue uses her second person research paper written during the following week as a forum to reflect on and inquire about her and our personal, interpersonal, and the group learning trajectory. (To give another impression of the degree of members' commitments

to these exercises, the paper was 15 single-spaced pages long, with 16 single-spaced pages of transcript as an appendix.) Here are two pages of Sue's paper:

*Much of the content of this exercise was the giving and receiving of feedback among members in the group. In the tables on the next pages, I summarize the feedback that was exchanged during the session. I characterize the feedback as single, double, or triple-loop feedback. **Single-loop feedback** is information that tells me whether or not my last move advanced me toward the goal. (AI, p. 16) **Double-loop feedback** addresses a person's strategy, structure, or goals. (AI, p. 18-19) **Triple-loop feedback** highlights the present relationship between our effects in the outside world and our actions, our strategies, and our attention itself. (Ibid.)*

I was struck by the richness of the feedback we gave each other, and I was generally impressed by the way people gave feedback during the session, which for the most part, I experienced as caring and skillful. (I say "for the most part" because I think both Nadine and I said things in the heat of the moment that could have been said more compassionately and with less charge.) I was also struck by the breadth of the feedback, and how each person was able to see something different, and important. I very much appreciated the diversity of voices around the table, because I got to see a lot more about how I was behaving and making sense of the situation than I would have if I'd been talking just with Nadine, or even with just one or two of you there. Each person brought something important to the discussion, and I am grateful for your participation.

I received five single-loop, seven double-loop, and two possibly triple-loop pieces of direct feedback from all six members of the group. The feedback to me covered several main themes:

- *The impact on Nadine of my evaluative comments and the way I presented my feedback, both in the emails that preceded the conversation and in the conversation itself*
- *Challenges to "own" my piece of the situation—it's not just Nadine's "incompetence" that's making me angry, it's something in me too!*
- *Challenges to see the good faith efforts that Nadine made to frame her paper as her own assumptions—which is inherent in a second-person paper—and which she invited people to test and discuss*
- *Invitations to look for the truth in what Nadine wrote—perhaps by considering that the motivations she attributed to me might be coming from my subconscious shadow side*
- *The difficulty of not mirroring one another's process in a situation—I made evaluative comments in response to what I perceived were Nadine's evaluative comments*

There was one other piece of feedback from Bob, who expressed his feeling that I was not "willing to open up and examine my own stuff." This feedback was countered, however, by Bill (speaking as me) who pointed out that while this may have been true in the first part of the conversation, I had been "very self-revealing" in the last 10 minutes of the conversation, by speaking for example about the buttons that were pushed in me.

Nadine received four single-loop pieces of feedback, four that were double-loop, and two that could be interpreted as either single or double-loop feedback. Feedback to Nadine covered the following main themes:

- *The impact of Nadine's second person paper on Sue*
- *Challenges to take more responsibility for impact of Nadine's paper on the people she is writing about who will be reading the paper*
- *Challenge to the appropriateness of the attitude "it's not a situation to me" in responding to someone who has been impacted by something Nadine wrote*
- *Invitation to view the alter-ego exercise as an opportunity to engage in mutual inquiry and learning, rather than trying to "make Sue feel better"*
- *Invitation to explore different ways of phrasing writing that address concerns or potential concerns of second-person paper readers*

Overall, this mini-cosmos of reflection and refraction among members of our group points to the consequences and learning we experienced around the idea of "competent" feedback, and how a mutual commitment to gifting one another with skillful feedback can generate true intimacy. A key developmental lesson to be gleaned from this series of communications, misperceptions, reactions and interactions is the idea and evidence that we can and do get more competent at giving significant feedback as we thrash and blunder incompetently through such feedback cycles first. The ability to transform through feedback that enables single-loop as well as double- and triple-loop learning is dependent on the co-occurrence of a choice and skillset to activate and digest that feedback. As Sue noted in the second person paper:

"It is tricky to evaluate whether participants accepted and digested feedback and used it to transform themselves, test their own frames, and feel the limitations and self-contradictions inherent in their view of reality. These processes are internal ones, which may or may not be reflected in observable behavior. Moreover, they take time. To accept and digest feedback, and then transform oneself—especially in a brief encounter when emotions are running high—is an extremely challenging undertaking."

Overall, these two members of our class proved themselves to be willing and active, and eventually even competent, agents of private and public change as they (and we) struggled through the dance of their feedback loops. This set of incidents in our action

inquiry model represents another juncture where learning was integrated within each I, across at least two You's, amidst our We (the group) and our collective It (the ARM class), and even (through this chapter) for other Its (university/societal norms around class/group feedback and learning).

References

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