7

Collaborative developmental action inquiry

Aftab Erfan and Bill Torbert

Action inquiry represents a wide field of action-oriented research alternatives. It emphasizes how action and inquiry constantly interweave with one another in social life and in social science. Its fundamental claim is that increased moment-by-moment awareness of the interconnectedness between action and inquiry can gradually develop the capacity of actor-researchers to generate timely action with others in the context of complex environments. Its social scientific claim is that intentional integration of multiple alternative approaches to inquiry (characterized by 27 flavors, three types of feedback, and eight types of power) leads to more valid, efficacious, and transformative results.

In this chapter, we introduce action inquiry (or, more formally, Collaborative Developmental Action Inquiry [CDAI] [Torbert, 2013]) as much by *displaying* its theoretical, methodological, practical, transformational, and mutual qualities as by *discussing* them. We do so through a series of short excerpts, created to give an experience of some of the 27 flavors of action inquiry (Chandler and Torbert, 2003). The chapter is not only *about* action inquiry: it is *an illustration of* action inquiry.

Action inquiry genesis and history – from Bill's journal

Written in 1st-person voice; about 1st-person practice; in the past

When you (Aftab) ask me where action inquiry came from, I first think of fifty years ago in my early twenties, when I became the founding director of a War on Poverty 'Upward Bound' program for inner-city youth. It seemed to me that when people of different cultures, classes, religions, genders, and races (such as the members of our program represented) tried to work and learn together, it required everyone to engage in simultaneous action and inquiry. I began to envision and to try to enact *timely action* (Box 1) in my leadership role (Torbert, 1976). We were not uniformly successful in that time of school riots and cities burning, but we did cut New Haven's drop-out rate in half. It was becoming apparent to me that such situations (that have today been given the acronym VUCA [volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity]) require deep listening into the Other(s) and into our own initially subconscious assumptions, gestures and voices from the inside as we act. A willingness to offer and to receive both challenging and supportive feedback seemed crucial to this, as did the increasing exercise of mutually transforming power rather than unilateral-coercive power (Garvey-Berger and Johnston, 2015).

> **Box 1: Timely action** is an inter-action or intentional absence-of-action (as small as asking a gentle question, as big as sending troops to war) that is *called for* in a given moment in time. Enabled through multiple qualities of awareness, timely action comes not too soon and not too late, not too fast and not too slow, and is the most effective and appropriate interaction in the present situation, from an expansive historical perspective. We can only question, never be certain, what action is timely now.

This combination of action and inquiry at the first-person, subjective self-study, second-person, intersubjective group-study, and third-person, objective institutional-study scales I named 'action science' back then in 1967–68 when I was first trying to do it. Later, when my mentor Chris Argyris borrowed this term to title one of his books (Argyris,

Putnam and Smith, 1985) and turned out to mean something somewhat different and much more restricted by it, I turned to the phrase 'action inquiry' as expressing more of the personal quality and the humility of this effort to grow personal and communal awareness and timeliness in the midst of interacting with one another, along with a commitment to learn something generalizable from such experiences that can later perhaps be published and potentially influence other practitioners. Not very many scholar/practitioners have adopted the action inquiry approach, but your work on your PhD, in particular, strikes me as being very similar to my own early efforts 50 years ago, for its community emphasis, cross-cultural challenges, and societal ambition.

On writing together – from Aftab's journal

Written in 1st-person voice; about 1st- and 2nd-person practice; in the present

'Is this the best use of my time?' I ask myself as I bring my attention to writing this chapter. It's a common question these days because I am stretched so thin in trying to 'do it all'. Motherhood has made me incredibly efficient, but not incredibly efficient enough…

'Yes, this is timely action!' the other voice in my head argues. Isn't it enough that I *want to* write with Bill? (How much of academic co-writing takes place in loving friendship? Almost 100% of mine in the past couple of years, I figure [e.g. Erfan and Sandercock, 2012; Erfan and Hemphill, 2013].) And we might even write something useful in a scholarly 'best-seller' that more than 12 people might read!

Nevertheless I have quite a bit of hesitation. It's tricky to write on action inquiry with the guy who 'invented' the concept. It feels like it will be hard to put my voice into the chapter because Bill has such a distinctive (dense) style of writing, and, being retired, he has far more time than I do to shape the piece. Part of me is already getting annoyed at the thought that no

matter how much work I put in, even if I first-author it, people will nonetheless talk about it as Bill Torbert's chapter in the 3rd edition of the HAR.

A more serious part of me wonders if I actually have very much to contribute here. I resonate with Bill's early work. I remember picking up *The Power of Balance* (Torbert, 1991) fortuitously, just as I started my PhD. I read Bill's and his friends' stories of being active, influential participants in settings they were studying, and seriously looking at their own interactions with the situation … and I thought, 'yes, that's what I need to do!' I had read a lot on action research, but I had always seen it as primarily an arms-length study of an external reality – even when it advocated positionality, reflexivity, and reciprocity, those seemed like add-ons or ethical accents on the 'actual' research (i.e. deserving a paragraph towards the start of a dissertation). But this idea that whole chapters could be devoted to autobiographical and relational writing as valid forms of academic inquiry was totally new and totally exciting to me. So I did that … but do I know enough about the ins and outs of action inquiry that I can be a co-author with Bill? Can we find a writing relationship that has the feeling of mutuality?

Understanding the work of co-authoring as action inquiry

Written in 2nd-person voice; about 2nd-person practice; at the present [at time of conversation]

A – I confess that when I read your chapters from the first and the second editions of the Handbook … well … I almost couldn't read them! And my first priority here is to write something that is more accessible and understandable than your usual.

B – (Nodding enthusiastically) I completely agree. I obviously have some commitment to the contrary but I'll do everything I can to yield that commitment. And I think, absolutely, the-reader-getting-it ought to be the priority.

A – Good, we're on the same page.

B – That right there, as people would start reading it, they'd say, 'What? It's something of Bill Torbert's but I'm willing to read it?! Who is the co-author? She must have had a real influence on him!' Your comment is a good example of double-loop feedback (Box 2) that may influence an old dog's writing style (both laughing).

Box 2: Types of Feedback
Action inquiry distinguishes between three types of feedback one might receive (or give):
- Single-loop feedback is a response that tells you you need to adjust how you're acting (incremental)
- Double-loop feedback is a response that tells you your approach or strategy needs to change (transformative)
- Triple-loop feedback is a response that makes a larger perspective or paradigm visible by evoking a profound feeling of inter-independence with the universe and your own congruity and incongruity within it (attention-awakening)

More mature action inquirers are better able to receive double- and triple-loop feedback, which in turn increases their ability to generate timely action and use power appropriately.

B – I want to say something in relation to your journal reflection – which is that I asked you to write with me on this, because I believe you will make the major contribution and that the quality of the chapter will be properly attributed to you as first author.

A – So you don't think the fact that you're an older, white, male, senior academic and I'm a young, junior, woman of color matters to who gets credit for this? You don't think our power differences matter?

B – I didn't say that, but I think what will matter more is how we exercise our power in relation to each other. That's what matters to me.

A – (Pausing) I appreciate what you're saying. But I disagree that the world is very likely to be that fair …. Anyway, maybe I don't have to worry about the world's reaction since it is out of my hands.

B – (Nodding silently).

Foundational concepts of action inquiry

Written in 2nd-person voice; about 3rd-person practice; in the past

B – I am just itching to share with you a quote that I found this morning. I loved it so much I really think we should include it in the chapter.

A – Let's hear it.

B – This is a quote attributed to Karl Rove, President George W. Bush's political handler and he's talking to a guy from the press around 2004 and he says 'You're part of the reality-based community, people who believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernable reality. That's not the way the world really works any more. We're an empire now. When we act we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality judiciously as you will, we'll act again, making other new realities, which you can study too! And that's how things will sort out. We are history's actors, and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do'.

A – (Laughing) So, how do you think that helps us understand what action inquiry is?

B – Well it is a reverse example; an illustration of exactly what action inquiry is not. It describes an action philosophy based on unilateral power and on not seeking out feedback (Box 3). And we can all judge now just how effective that philosophy was in the 2002–2008 period.

A – Hmmm. I thought you were going to say that it is a reverse example of action inquiry in that the actors and the inquirers are in their own silos. It's the job of the White House to make decisions for the nation, and the journalists' job to ask questions, but they don't even see themselves as part of the same reality.

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Box 3: Unilateral vs. Mutual Power
X exercises unilateral power if X unidirectionally causes Y to do what Y does. X may use a variety of methods including coercion, seduction, or convincing. In contrast, X and Y exercise mutual power if X and Y influence each other in the course of doing something together. They both attempt to exert influence, both offer one another feedback on their progress, and both listen vulnerably.

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B – Yes, from a different vantage point, we're both, as was Rove, talking about what it looks like when action and inquiry are treated as split alternatives rather than as mutually necessary!

A – To me what's distinct about action inquiry – as opposed to other action research – is the focus on the alternative ways of inquiring, what you describe in your 27 flavors article (Chandler and Torbert, 2003). I imagine this three dimensional matrix, a cube of possibilities, where the x-dimension designates three different possible voice flavors (1st-person 'I'; 2nd-person 'thou/we'; 3rd-person 'it/they'), the y-dimension describes three different flavors of the practice we could be studying (1st person, one's own practice; 2nd person, one's and others' practice in relationship to each other; and 3rd person, other people's practice), and the z-dimension defines three different flavors of time (past; present; future). 3x3x3=27. Did I get that right?

Figure 7.1
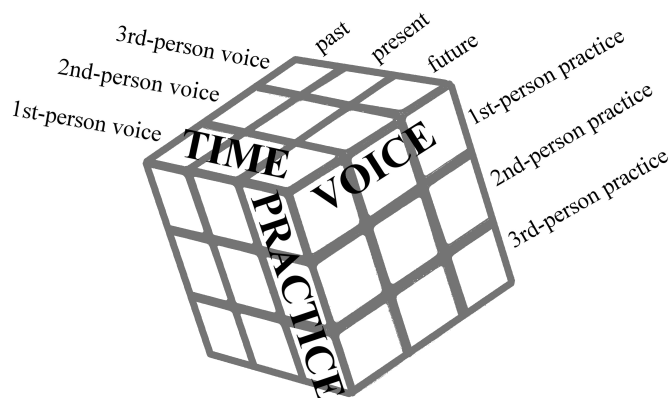
B – Yes, that's the way Dawn Chandler and I packaged it in that 2003 article.

A – So I think we should go into each dimension a little bit, but before we do that – the overall message is that most of the research happening out there, particularly academic research, is happening in one little box in the corner of the cube: it is written in a generalized voice (3rd-person voice) about what other people have done (3rd-person practice) in the past. And what you're saying is, 'hey, there are 26 other possibilities!' So, action inquiry is really research that spans across a few of those boxes in the cube, combining different flavors.

B – Yeah, right, that's the idea. But what I am additionally saying – in part based on an empirical claim and data – is that you get more valid and robust results if you span multiple boxes. So, you're not just doing triangulation among 3rd-person measures, but triangulation of 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-person methods. You're going to come closer to an appreciation of the actual complex reality you're participating in, the more of the boxes you engage deliberately in your action inquiry.

A – What's the empirical data supporting this?

Box 4: Action Inquiry in the Organizational Setting (Torbert's longitudinal research)
Fewer than 5% of all leaders tested to date operate from action-logics (named the Transforming, Alchemical, and Ironic action-logics, see Box 7) that reliably generate organizational transformation. This conclusion is based on using a much-validated developmental sentence-completion psychometric (the Global Leadership Profile) and other measures with high inter-rater reliability, Torbert and colleagues have measured the developmental status of CEOs and lead consultants in samples of both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. *Only* those operating from developmentally-late action-logics, characterized by the ability to integrate multiple forms of inquiry in action succeed in transforming themselves, others, and the organization (see Torbert, 2004 and 2013, for detailed summary).

B – The 'Concluding Scientific Postscript' of my 2004 book (Torbert, 2004) points to a study that explains an astounding 59% of the variance, with less than a 0.01 chance of error. This study shows that the organizations that were more successful in transforming engaged in

more forms of action inquiry (up to 15) than the ones that didn't succeed in transforming (Box 4).

A – Why do you think that happens? Why is it better to engage multiple forms?

B – Well, it has to do with the ability to generate feedback. The 27 flavors generate either single-, double-, or triple-loop feedback for the participants in their activity. The more you seek out and successfully offer feedback, the more you and other participants will choose different actions, different strategies, or different paradigms as you interact – which is the same as saying: the more you will be exercising mutually transforming power.

A – Hmmm. I'm not quite getting what you're saying but this is reminding me a little bit of the experience of my dissertation research. Can we talk about that for a minute? (Box 5)

B – Yes (nodding enthusiastically).

A – So, when I was doing my fieldwork I would be facilitating a community workshop and, say, there would be a little conflict in the room. During the break I would journal about how I was feeling and how I thought things were going for participants (1st-person voice, 1st- and 3rd-person practice, present). Then immediately after the workshop I would debrief with my co-conveners particularly around how we had co-convened together (2nd-person voice, 2nd-person practice, immediate past). And then weeks later I would transcribe the recording of the session (3rd-person voice, 3rd-person practice, past). And when I put all these sets of information next to each other, there would be overlaps and discrepancies between them about what had actually happened in the room. But the messages that stood out from the juxtaposition were way more informative than any of those forms of data on their own. I felt like I got life-altering feedback on my own blind spots, for example, and started to adjust

9

details of what I was doing, but also how I conceived of the project, and even how I saw myself and my reasons for being in my line of work.

B – Definitely sounds like you got some valuable single-, double- and triple-loop feedback.

Box 5: Action Inquiry In A Community Setting (Erfan's Dissertation)

This study reflects on my community-based action research on a small First Nations reserve on Vancouver Island (British Columbia, Canada). Between 2009 and 2012, and particularly over a year of intensive fieldwork, I followed an invitation to engage in this community to assist in the ambitious task of addressing intergenerational trauma, a legacy of the Indian Residential School system for which the Canadian Prime Minister offered a formal apology in 2008. Written as mixed-genre creative analytic process (CAP) ethnography – interweaving autobiographical, dialogic and propositional forms-, the study tells the stories of my engagement, and in particular, of a series of intergenerational workshops I facilitated in this community. I document evidence of modest but promising patterns of individual and collective 'healing' and 'transformation' in the course of the workshops, and evaluate the effectiveness of my tools and approaches using 1st-person (reflective), 2nd-person (interpersonal), and 3rd-person (informant-based) sources of information. I show that the ability of external actors such as myself to intervene successfully in such sensitive settings depends not on local knowledge or a technical repertoire, but on the quality of one's 'metaskills' or personal capacities –most significantly: compassion, playfulness and beginner's mind.

Discussion of the three dimensions of action inquiry: Voice, practice, time

Written in 2nd-person voice, about 1st- and 3rd-person practice, in the past

A – So, let me try and see if I can bring us back to say a little about the three dimensions of that cube. The first one is voice…. Yes? Should we do this?

B – Yes, let's.

A – I think everyone reading this already knows what the 3rd person voice sounds like – the detached, anonymous, dispassionate voice of 90-something percent of scholarship – and

increasingly we also know what the 1st person voice sounds like – the passionate 'I', disclosing one's own subjective perspective. The 2nd person voice is somewhat more original and less familiar, isn't it?

B – Well, no, in the sense that it goes at least as far back as Plato's dialogues. But it's definitely a minority voice in present day social science. And I would say that action inquiry probably has the most to add to science in the realm of 2nd-person inquiry, and in the realm of interweaving the three voices – interweaving the passionate, the compassionate, and the dispassionate.

A – So, to make it concrete, what we're doing in the chapter, this dialogue, is an example of writing in 2nd person voice. Right?

B – Yes. Still another kind of written dialogue occurs when two people each write separately about their relationship, then share what they've written with one another (and discover real sensitivities to one another's characterizations), then talk about that and write some more. Hilary Bradbury and I are currently working our way through that kind of exercise.

A – And another example would be from my dissertation where I am essentially reproducing the drama of interaction between multiple people, by editing down the transcripts of workshops.

B – Right. I found those most memorable. The workshops with the teenagers and the women, where you were getting people to speak to the reality they were experiencing…. And in those, there is a space for different perceptions of reality to emerge.

A – Let's move on to the practice dimension for a second. Again, action inquiry distinguishes between research that happens on 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-person practice. And again, 3rd-person practice is pretty well understood: almost all of quantitative research, surveys, subject

interviews, ethnographic studies … they examine the practices of some 'others over there'. 2nd-person practice would be something like what you and Hilary are doing – examining yourselves in your relationship to each other. 1st-person practice would be like what I was doing: examining my own facilitation practice as I worked in a community with a lot of trauma – but also my own dealings with trauma that came up while I was in the field – and reporting out those things I was learning that could also be useful for other people.

B – Another good example is Cara Miller's PhD dissertation (2012). She studies her own teaching for four semesters. That's a study of 1st-person practice. And then in general my work is seen as that – that there is more emphasis on 1st-person practice in particular.

A – Sometimes too much.

B – (Laughing) Sometimes too much.

A – I found it pretty hard to make a case to some people at my university that the 1st-person stuff actually mattered. Is that resistance everywhere in academia?

B – Well I think it still is, for sure. Although in the last 20 years, there has been a lot more legitimacy granted particularly to methodologies like auto-ethnography and the 100 different names that have been given to, sort of 'self-study'. The thing is, these forms of qualitative research, though they have a strong 1st person quality, usually are not related to studying oneself in action.

A – Right, cause if you're doing an auto-ethnography you can be describing what happened to you when you got cancer, but you're not necessarily studying what you did and what impact you had.

B – Exactly. But in any form of action inquiry, you have to study your own actions. And not only your actions but also your interaction with others.

A – And then, what about the time dimension?

B – Well, in the case of time, of course it's the research into future possibilities that is the least understood. I mean, you know, most research is about the past. Even if it is a tape recording of today's conversation when we study it and analyze it and use it, the event is in the past. So a lot of people don't have any idea what research in the present could really mean. But obviously we think we do!

A – What do 'we' think it could really mean?

B – It means inquiring into what is taking place right now. So you know, I am just about to ask you if we've talked for long enough and if we're done for today, cause I'd like to move onto other things.

A –And I would say that I'll be ready to stop as soon as we finish talking about the time dimension. Can you last that long?

B – Yeah, yeah, but note that we've just done a teensy piece of research on the present and the immediate future that helps us share a sense of free choice and common commitment about what to do next.

A – Noted!. So, how do you describe researching the future?

B – It typically sounds impossible because the future hasn't yet come, so how could you possibly study it? And it is of course true that you're not working with the same kind of empirical data that you're working with when you're doing research on the past. Although

the typical first attempt that people make is just to project empirical patterns from the past onto the future, which is the least likely to be right.

A – What are some of the examples of forms for studying the future that you consider better? What comes to my mind is Otto Scharmer's writing about … what does he call it? Listening to the future? Leading from an emerging future. Is that the kind of thing you're talking about? (Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013).

B – Right, it seems that that methodology is mainly about listening so well into the complexities of the present that the possibilities for the future emerge. I also think of trying to create a shared vision for the future, collectively, for a company or a community as studying the future. And, you know my old friend Jay Ogilvy has been one of the people who has done most work on futurology – developing scenario-planning methodologies (Ogilvy, 2011), as Adam Kahane has also done. Those are some different examples.

A – Okay, I know we need to stop, but I just want to check one little thing. About five minutes ago you said something like 'if you're doing action inquiry you have to study yourself'. When we first started talking we said that to do action inquiry you somehow span across more than one of the 27 boxes. But it's almost like you're suggestion there are some boxes that are mandatory and some that are optional! Do you have a sense of what boxes are mandatory?

B – Hmmm. I mean, full-fledged action inquiry would require all three 1st, 2nd and 3rd persons voice and all three types of practice, and all three time horizons, past, present and future.

A – Okay, that's very ambitious, but are some of those boxes better than others?

B – Well, if I had to choose one I would say it is 2nd person voice, on 2nd person practice, in the present – right in the center of the cube. And again, that's because that's where I think action inquiry makes a novel contribution. And also because that's such a rich space, you get so much feedback by inquiring into what's happening between you and another person in real time. It's really useful for generating timely action. But ultimately there isn't one 'better' box.

A – Fair enough. It also occurs to me that you could of course do any of the boxes in a better way and a worse way.

B – Yes, there are issues of rigor and integrity that are essential for making the research 'good' regardless of which and how many of the boxes you check.

On writing together – from Aftab's journal

Written in 1st-person voice, about 1st- and 2nd-person practice, in the past

Bill and I had a call to generate our material for our HAR chapter. It was a good call, but I noticed afterward I had a headache. I suppose it was the subtle pressure of being 'on the air' or maybe the time pressure. I felt like I was working too hard and my game was slightly off. This makes me sad, because the thing is, Bill and I are good at having interesting, leisurely conversations. But this one was a little stressful, a little too fast, like it was being pushed along. This was my own making. My mind was too eager to find the next question to ask and the next comments to make. Maybe I was trying to sound smart? Why couldn't I relax into it? What would have happened if I could? (Example of 1st-person, reflective, double-loop feedback to oneself.)

Conversation about writing together

Written in 2nd-person voice; about 2nd-person practice; at the present

B – I had a process reaction to our talk last time, which intersects in some odd angle with your journal entry, so I'd like to share that.

A – Yes, please.

B – I thought, both during and immediately after it, 'Yeah, this was a different conversation than we usually have and what was different about it?' And the way I characterized it to myself was that I had never known you to be as differential as you seemed to be, you were sort of really picking my brain, and looking for precision. You were more directed toward the task than typical.

A – Yes, I felt a little like a taskmaster. I guess I feel that it's my job to give our conversation structure. And giving it structure is one of the ways I know of making the chapter clear and readable. I love our meandering talks but I don't think they would read very well.

B – And I think what you did was great and you shouldn't stop.

A – I shouldn't stop trying to give it form and precision, but I should also try to relax at the same time.

B – Well, I feel that we have talked about most of the important things … except for power. I would like to talk more about power.

A – Sure. Wait! At the risk of sounding like a taskmaster, why is a discussion of power important in a chapter on action inquiry?

A discussion on mutually transforming power

Written in 2nd- and 3rd-person voice, on 3rd-person practice, in the past

B – Ah, I thought the connection was perfectly obvious! Good double-loop feedback. Let me back up and explain: if you actually take what we've been talking about seriously, and begin to really study particularly the 1st- and 2nd-person practices (your interactions with a community of others) then how you and the community exercise power inevitably becomes a key aspect of the inquiry, because each action we take has a 'power signature'…. Now you really have to put a developmentalist lens on for the rest of this to make sense.

A – Thanks for the warning. It's on!

B – I've been saying that as you engage in action inquiry, and as you develop towards later *action-logics* (Box 6), you increasingly need, and may be capable of conceptualizing and exercising mutual power, as opposed to unilateral power.

A – All right. Go on.

B – When you first begin to exercise mutual power (visioning power and praxis power) you're certainly working *with* other people, rather than telling other people what to do. But I guess there is still very much a sense that there are leaders and followers; this set of opposites breaks down more in the movement towards the latest action-logics and the fullness of mutually transforming power (Box 7).

> **Box 6: An action-logic** is the operating system that interweaves a person's thoughts, emotions and practices (not the person's espoused theory of practice, but the person's actual pattern of practice). Adult developmental theory posits a sequence of progressively more complex, more inclusive, more mutual, more inquiring, and less assumptive action-logics that lead toward the continual human practice of action inquiry.

But once you're there in a space of seeking true mutuality, the trouble (and the opportunity) is that suddenly you find yourself in a mess of opposites, none of which can be said to be good or bad. Earlier action-logics may not even see the mess, because things look black or white to them – either good or bad.

Box 7: When, Developmentally, 8 Kinds of Power & 3 Kinds of Feedback Become Available

UNILATERAL TYPES OF POWER

Coercive power: "comes from the barrel of a gun." (Opportunist action-logic)

Charming power: charisma, diplomacy, covert manipulation, self-disclosure, support… (Diplomat action-logic)

Logistical power: the use of logic, professional disciplines, systems analysis, institutional position or process to get something done. (Expert action-logic)

Productive power: actually producing a product, service, or sheer action valuable to self or others, most often in co-ordination with a team, welcoming single-loop feedback that helps reach goal. (Achiever action-logic).

MUTUAL TYPES OF POWER

Visioning power: use of the imaginative, artistic, mutually-trust-building faculties and disciplines, alone in nature and with committed colleagues or friends in society, to create new visions of the future of this conversation, meeting, organization, etc. (Redefining action-logic)

Praxis power: the collaborative, inquiring power, with others, to occasionally spot, articulate, and correct incongruities among the four territories of experience (visioning, strategizing, performing, and assessing outcomes), thus increasing individual and organizational integrity, alignment, and efficacy. Welcomes double-loop feedback. (Transforming action-logic)

Mutually-transforming power: the 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-person practices of vigilant and vulnerable presence to one another that generates power via love and inquiry more than via the first four unilateral types of power (e.g. Martin Luther King and the non-violent civil rights movement). Welcomes triple-loop feedback. (Alchemical action-logic)

The power of liberating disciplines: a leadership team – interweaving the foregoing seven kinds of power and three types of feedback in timely ways – to generate third-person structures, task boundaries, and action inquiry challenges that improve organizational or communal outcomes (see Torbert, 1991). (Ironic action-logic)

A – When you say mess of opposites, you're talking about people's different tendencies, like thinkers/feelers, idealists/pragmatists, giver/receivers…

B – Yes but I'm also talking historical opposites, such as rich/poor, black (brown, red, yellow)/white, left/right, and male/female. Whoever is moving towards the latest action-logics eventually becomes aware that their own ideological underpinnings have to be shaken and ultimately melt in the process. So that's a whole different level of vulnerability and discipline. You give up your own ideological defenses in favor of a friendly but demanding kind of alertness of attention, alone and with one another, in the service of timely action and developmental transformation.

A – So almost like, if you have these opposites and if you acknowledge both ends of each polarity to be true, and you have a kind of vision or plan or strategy that is encompassing all those opposites, then really the kind of power you're exercising is being alert to know which quality to draw on and how much, and make those moment to moment decisions between the opposites.

B – Right, right, exactly. I mean, that's where 'timely' really means something: how to be timely in every moment rather than just in big historical terms.

A – So one trouble I am having with what you just said is that the way you talk about power, it's so different from the way people usually think about power that it's almost not recognizable as the same material – which I guess in some way it isn't. I have a hard time even thinking why it is called power, as opposed to something else.

B – Well because it has an effect, even transformational effects. Unilateral power, at its most effective, causes people to conform; but it has no potential (from the Latin 'potentia' which means power) for causing oneself or others to transform. Only mutually vulnerable, loving,

inquiring power can transform oneself or others (other than by some accident of circumstance).

A – I get what you're saying, but even putting the words 'loving' and 'power' together might land for some as kind of strange. I would say a much more common conception is to imagine power and love as two ends of a polarity, they have these opposite qualities, and you can't just put them together and they become one thing! There can be a kind of dance between the two of them that Adam Kahane is advocating in his *Power and Love* (Kahane, 2010). But the way you explained that third kind of power – mutually transforming power – sounded like power is actually the ability to go between these opposites and navigate them on a moment by moment basis. So it's a little confusing that power could be both the thing in between and one of the poles, you know!?

B – Aha. Aha. Well said! But one of the qualities that we developmentalists theorize is true of action-logics (as it is of the scientific universe in general) is that the later action-logics (and scientific paradigms) include all the earlier perspectives, types of power, and types of feedback. So, toward the later stages of human development the subject, the object, and the in-between (or, in scientific terms, the measured 'cause', the measured 'outcome', and the 'interaction effects') begin blending into one another more often.

A – Hmm. (Pause) I'm not one hundred percent with you, but I would say that I've absorbed as much as I can absorb right now.

B – Okay, let's stop then.

A – (Pause) How do you think we exercised power together today?

B – (Pause) Maybe we should leave that to our readers to decide…

Conclusion

Written in 3rd-person voice, about 2nd- and 3rd-person practice, past and future

This chapter has been a 'show and tell' on action inquiry, an approach to social science and social life that promotes integration of multiple flavors of research. By simultaneously studying and cultivating 1st-person awareness and leaderly behavior, 2nd-person cultures characterized by pertinent feedback, mutual power, and high trust, and 3rd-person social systems that balance purposive efficacy, developmental transformation, and self-direction over longer time cycles, action inquiry is always questioning what constitutes timely interaction in the present situation from multiple perspectives – and thereby increasingly generates timely action.

By presenting the chapter in its present form as a series of connected excerpts, we have intended to meet several objectives: (1) To give a taste of several different flavors of action inquiry in one place; (2) To give an illustration of one such flavor – use of 2nd-person voice on 2nd-person practice in the present – through a dialogue between the two authors on their practice of co-writing, which runs through the chapter and routinely turns to examine itself. We have argued that action inquiry makes a particular contribution to action research by leading the exploration of 2nd-person forms of inquiry such as this, in which multiplicity of views is preserved and appreciated; (3) To show how the juxtaposition and interweaving of various forms and flavors of inquiry can lead to single-, double- or triple-loop feedback and enhanced understanding of situations. The authors, for example, get insight into their writing relationship by sharing their personal journals (1st-person voice on 1st- and 2nd-person practice) and then discussing their reactions (2nd-person voice on 1st- and 2nd-person practice); (4) To offer an example of two people who strive to find mutuality in their relationship (despite vast differences between them), to exercise mutually transforming

power, and to generate timely action. The decision to present the chapter in this manner, inevitably, also has drawbacks. We have almost definitely tried to do too much, introducing too many complex layers in one short chapter. We most likely lost those readers who found the overall sense of fragmentation in the chapter, or the fluid and inefficient nature of the dialogue format too frustrating.

Certainly, a growing number of academics seem to be writing in creative, potent ways. But the call to Collaborative Developmental Action Inquiry demands much more than a wider range of writing styles: action inquiry will demand new kinds of discipline and ethics in relation to:

1. the integrity and truthfulness of our 1st-person action and self-observation, since our claims can be externally unverifiable;

2. the love, inquiry, and sophistication of our 2nd-person exercises of mutuality, and

3. the detachment and dispassion of our 3rd-person leadership practices and research publications in service to the wider world beyond us and our immediate constellations of colleagues, family, and friends.

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