Using Space to Encourage New Perspectives

- **Introduces new perspectives**
- **Enables people to act out and understand interactions between different perspectives**

Are there different perspectives that you would like your learners to appreciate? How might you place these perspectives in conversation?

The learning environment that we are in can act as a teacher. The way we orient desks – circles, small groups, create space to move around, the use of different types of seating such as sofas or casual spaces and the places we place our technology equipment can establish a certain ambience and expectations. We can go even further so that the space of the room becomes a stage – with different parts of it taking on a perspective. By moving into a particular space within the room we are then moving into a perspective. A person might walk through the room and think how their perspective changes as they move into different parts. They could stay in one section of the room and provide the perspective of that section in conversation with others.

Example: *The Integral Quadrant Room*

The challenge: During the Tools for Learning Design (TLD) workshop a dominant perspective that underpinned many choices and ways of thinking was a very *corporatised perspective* – needing KPIs, outcomes, getting measurables. Some participants described themselves as cogs in a system, having to follow procedures and rules to make things work together. Research was often seen as quantitative (getting hard data) or qualitative (understanding the reasons behind things so we can improve). Even the qualitative approaches seemed to come from an objective third person perspective still based on the notion of outcomes.

I – Why I do How I experience, feel, think, believe, value, and grow.	**IT – What I do** Behaviours, products, measurables
WE – Why we do Relationships, shared, values, cultures, norms	**ITS – How we do** System dynamics, social systems, policy

How might it then be possible to change or expand the conversation? The first step is to consider what other perspectives might be missing. We decided to use a framework using the Integral Theory four quadrant model.

Integral Theory Model

Integral theory is a meta-theory that offers a range of generic frameworks and processes that can be used across disciplines and contexts, often enabling an expansion of what we see. It enables reconciliation between competing values and approaches by helping to frame them in larger wholes. The *four quadrant model* aims to map some key different ways we can know the world. Different sorts of questions can be asked from each of the quadrants depending on a topic. For example, the "**I**" quadrant is focused on the phenomena and quality of the lived experience of people, whereas the "**IT**" quadrant is focused on the tangible products of that experience.

Artefacts in the Quadrants:

I – mannequin to represent the person, collages based on individuals' exploration of values and visions, cushions for individuals

IT – goals, learning edge charts, action research steps, chairs

WE – couches for people to have conversations, artefacts that illuminated underpinning cultures

ITS – computer and table, artefacts that looked at dynamics of system and constraints.

Setting up the room

For our final workshop in the TLD project, we divided the room into four (pictured) to represent each of the Integral Theory quadrants (I, WE, IT, ITS). Artefacts and

props developed from previous workshops were placed in each quadrant to represent the research perspective or orientation of each quadrant.

We asked people to go around and become familiar with the room and to add new artefacts to the different quadrants based on their experience of their own research projects. Following this, four participants gave presentations and the audience sat in different spaces around the room, listening from their designated perspective (whether it was fully in a quadrant or straddling between them). Following the presentation the audience gave their feedback from the perspective they were sitting in.

Audience responses

In some cases members of the audience gave responses that were not representative of the perspective they were sitting in, and the facilitator moved them to the one best representing their response. This helped everyone get a better understanding of the perspectives and how they were different.

Further, this enabled a far more nuanced dialogical response to presentations as the different perspectives were often in tension with each other, and through such a discussion we were able to illuminate issues that may have gone unnoticed. People shifted positions, and thus perspectives, between presentations and were able to experience what it was like listening and giving feedback from different stances.

What became clear to us was how much the **IT** (outcomes, measurables, get it done) and **ITS** (system, policies, infrastructures) voices were the ones most heard in the adult training sector, and how important it was to hear the other voices. Where you sit certainly changes what you begin to see and value.

I (individual subjective)	**IT** (individual objective)
Patterns of development and learning (e.g. transformation, learning styles) *(Psychology)*	Judgment, standards, measurement Tools for measuring competence *(Empiricism)*
Inner thoughts, feelings, intuitions, dreams, reflections, experiences, values, motivations, lenses, worldviews, mental models, beliefs *(Phenomenology, autobiography)*	Products, behaviours What I do or make *(Behaviourism)*
Relationships, dialogue, shared meaning *(Hermeneutics, narrative inquiry)*	Feedback of the world to my/our actions, and my response to the world *(Auto-poesis)*
Culture, values, norms *(Anthropology, ethnography)* **WE** (inter-subjective)	Ecological and socio-political systems, networks, dynamics, policies *(System dynamics, sociology)* **ITS** (inter-objective)

Example: *The Holon Room*

The following day we still had three presentations in the TLD workshop to go. We realised that the four quadrant model, while highly useful, was too limiting and we needed to consider the issues from another perspective. We chose a Holon model where each circle represented a layer of the system starting from individual, to team, organisation, system, nation, world, and cosmos.

The participants worked together to create nested circles on the floor using masking tape (pictured). Initially participants familiarised themselves with the framework by standing in circles representing the levels they were most operating at, and then exploring others. They were asked to consider how the different levels impacted them and where they might prefer to be.

During each presentation the audience sat in the different levels and listened to presentations giving feedback from that level. It helped to reveal where in the overall scheme of things issues were, and showed how important it was to take into account the different levels, each with quite different views and power for change. Some levels were helpful to others while some were in conflict. One person created her entire presentation as a story of navigating through these different levels, showing the complexity of creating significant change.

The original metaphor that we used to create this space was that we are individuals whose actions ripple outwards. However, this arrangement also became a symbol for individuals being trapped within the boundaries of organisations, systems, the nation and so forth. The representation of these levels in this nested way, created a realisation that, in fact, we preferred to be individuals who could choose to move at different levels of the system, and perhaps this needed to be represented in a different way.

The Advantage of Using Space to Showcase Perspectives

What is the difference in using the room as a means to showcase different perspectives, and giving people perspectives to play on cards?

Often perspectives on a card become familiar to the person who has the card, but is not so visible to the others. People can become entrenched into a perspective and there may not be much space to manoeuvre within the role play. Here the room is the stage, always visible to everyone. Everyone can see the perspective and can move into it or out of it. The person is therefore not the perspective, just representing it momentarily for the service of the exploration. A participant can get up and explain the tensions they are experiencing by moving through the room.

Some people need more time than others to tune into the different perspectives of the spaces and the role of the facilitator is to help people recognise what their stance is and where it is best represented in the space. If they respond from a position that is not where they are sitting in, gently suggest that they move to a position where they think their response is coming from.

Designing a perspective room:
- What perspective framework might open up participants to new perspectives?
- What activities might you do to familiarise participants with the room?
- What activity (e.g. student or teacher presentation) might you use to stimulate the conversation?

Facilitation Tips:
- Encourage people to speak up from different perspectives so that they are all heard initially.
- Encourage people to tease out the differences in perspectives – to go more fully into their perspective and to describe their response.
- Consider sometimes, if appropriate, using debate between perspectives as a way of making visible the typical tensions.
- Trust participants to provide their perspective in a timely fashion so that a dialogical story is being told with greater emergence of insight and nuance.
- Encourage not just dialogue between the participants but also for a participant to become dialogical by moving through the room and the perspectives to explore the tensions they are seeing.

Acknowledgements & Background

This resource was put together by Dr Sue Stack (pictured, top) based on activities she developed with Dr Helen Bound (bottom) for workshops for the Tool for Learning Design project. Thanks to all the participants of the Tools for Learning Design project who provide examples for this activity.

This and other content related to the Tools for Learning Design project can be found on the Tools for Re-imagining Learning website, a resource for trainers, curriculum and learning designers, and training leaders in the Singapore Continuing Education and Training sector interested in deepening understanding of their practice to create innovative and enlivening possibilities for their adult learners.

The Tools for Re-imagining Learning website and the Tools for Learning Design project overview can be found at www.ial.edu.sg.

For more information on the Tools for Learning Design project or the Tools for Re-imagining Learning website (content), please email Dr Stack at susan.stack@utas.edu.au or Dr Bound at helen_bound@ial.edu.sg.

We welcome questions or feedback on this publication, the Tools for Learning Design research report or the Tools for Re-imagining Learning website (layout or technical issues). Please email research@ial.edu.sg.

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