

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITIES WITH SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

This study presents Dramatic Problem Solving Facilitation Model (DPSFM) and Interactive Management (IM) as innovative alternative dispute resolution approaches that incorporate communication technologies in recording and analyzing data. DPSFM utilizes performance-based actions with facilitation methods to assist participants design action plans. Interactive Management (IM) utilizes a holistic, culturally sensitive and systemic approach to resolve complex problems. Communication technological assistance is accompanied by IM to enhance parsimony and support saliency of the ideas generated. Both approaches support action plans. This paper argues that both DPSFM and IM are theoretical frameworks that are valuable for conflict resolution, educators, and social science specialists who are interested in conducting research under the paradigm of knowing referred to as *scholarship of engagement*. This paradigm engages participants in research while promoting action plans and improving status quo conditions. The current paper overviews the benefits of both models and makes a strong case for application of their communication technologies across a variety of contexts. DPSFM and IM are directly involved with promoting change, and supporting actions to improve human conditions. The framework of *scholarship of engagement* is introduced as an integrative model for praxis.

Dramatic Problem Solving Facilitator Model (DPSFM) and Interactive Management (IM)

This paper explores the role that facilitation processes play as facilitators work with innovative and creative approaches to promote empowerment and conflict transformation for individuals and groups within a variety of contexts. It specifically discusses the manner that the Dramatic Problem Solving Facilitator Model (DPSFM), which was previously termed and introduced as Dramatic Problem Solving (Hawkins & Georgakopoulos, 2010), and Interactive Management (IM) can both be applied in several contexts. The strength of both

Dramatic Problem Solving Facilitator Model (DPSFM) and Interactive Management (IM) is that they democratize facilitative processes while promoting ownership and commitment on the part of stakeholders who are working through conflict. Another salient feature of both facilitation models is that they are applicable for complex or class II conflicts that are not easily approached by traditional methods of problem solving (Broome, 1997; Hawkins & Georgakopoulos, 2010; Warfield, 1982; Warfield, 1995; Warfield & Cardenas, 1995).

What follows first is a discussion on an alternative and integrative-based tradition that has been coined *scholarship of engagement*. Second, a description of assumptions, goals, methodologies, conceptualizations, and contributions of the theoretical perspectives involved with both DPSFM and IM will be provided. Finally, implications of DPSFM and IM, which are examples of research that follow the scholarship of engagement tradition, with *praxis* at their hearts, will be discussed.

Critique of Traditional Educational Systems and Delivery Formats

Often, social science research is conducted utilizing a particular method that is uni-directional and the researcher completes a project and leaves the site with little impact on the individuals or site involved in the study. Many individuals have expressed disenfranchisement with the work of institutions of higher learning (Barker, 2004; Boyer, 1996) since academia has popularly been related with research from an “Ivory Tower” ideology where knowledge has been considered to be housed and disseminated for select audiences, rather than translated to pedestrians and to the masses. The *scholarship of engagement* (SE) is an alternative approach to the long critiqued “Ivory-Tower” ideology, as it engages academia with the community in a unique partnership to resolve contemporary moral, economic, social, and civic problems.

The current research provides an example of how conflict resolution specialists and/or professionals within multidisciplinary backgrounds can engage community participants or organizational members in developmental facilitation. Developmental facilitation models, like DPSFM and IM have the likely potential to help participants resolve their own conflict in conflict situations even after the facilitator leaves the site (Schwarz, 2002). The idea is similar to the popular adage, “If one catches a fish, one can feed a person for a day, but if one teaches a person how to fish, one can feed a person for a lifetime!” The current paper calls for professionals involved in education, not only to engage in the task of reporting findings to further advance research, but also to engage participants in the task of improving the human condition in a humanistic manner that respects the voices of people in communities across villages and cities in the world. This is possible when the developmental facilitator supports action plans developed by participants themselves (Schwarz, 2002; Hawkins & Georgakopoulos, 2010). It is argued that the close engagement between the researcher and participants in a study should promote positive impacts and outcomes in communities.

The ultimate impact of gathering different types of information is that it enables researchers to develop what Gadamer (1975) terms as *fusion of horizons*, which refers to a deeper gestalt understanding of a phenomenon that is made possible by viewing a range of visions from different vantage points. Aristotle suggested all humans desire to know and this is evidenced presently when one views the variety of approaches that are available for making sense of the world. Bernstein's (1983) notion of a *dialogic community* refers to different academic camps sharing in dialogue. His notion is that the hermeneutic approach to truth goes beyond objectivism and relativism and ultimately is about praxis, which SE ultimately supports as well.

What follows is a discussion of *scholarship of engagement*, which is an example of an integrative perspective that takes into account a systems perspective of approaching conflict in communities. Scholarship of engagement greatly involves transformation, action, and change.

Scholarship of Engagement

The scholarship of engagement is not simply outreach or research in the community; rather it is true partnership between the community and academia (Burrage, Shattell, & Haberman, 2005). Burrage et al. (2005) described it as community-based research and Mitchell (2010) suggested it is a scholarship of community engagement. Often the scholarship of engagement refers to new partnerships that formulate (Burrage et al., 2005) between stakeholders (community members), experts (professionals working with or in the community), and researchers who specialize in a phenomenon within the community or the community itself.

Barker (2004) argued that several of the core elements of the scholarship of engagement transcend or exceed traditional functions of higher education. Research in this vein collectively supports that the goal for this form of scholarship includes deepening community involvement while advancing academic knowledge (Barker, 2004). Similarly Boyer (1996) defined the scholarship of engagement as creating a climate in which civic and academic cultures interact continuously and creatively with each other, enriching and enhancing the quality of life for all involved (Boyer, 1996).

Boyer (1996) described four essential functions in the scholarship of engagement, which all directly relate to knowledge: (1) the scholarship of discovery, (2) the scholarship of integration, (3) the scholarship of dissemination, and (4) the scholarship of application. Research that promotes positive impacts for communities has been coined the *scholarship of engagement* when the researcher engages with community members as co-participants, co-creators, and co-owners of the research. With this engagement approach to research, partnerships cultivate (participants with participants, participants with researchers, community with academia), understanding emerges, skills are honed, action plans are designed, and conditions ultimately change to improve the status quo. Thus,

valuable tools are formulated during this unique partnership between academia and the public.

Role of Facilitator in the DPSFM and IM

DPSFM and IM align with the positioned subject approach to inquiry, which is an approach that places trust in the site of the participant as the site of knowledge. The participant refers to people with particular needs, perceptions, and capabilities for action, and position refers to the context in which they are located. The meaning making that is derived from this approach places trust in how people make sense of their experiences and values the standpoint of the participants.

Dramatic Problem Solving Facilitation Model (DPSFM)

The Dramatic Problem Solving Facilitation Model (DPSFM) is a facilitation process that is based on the work of Augusto Boal (1995) and the Theatre of the Oppressed. This form of theatre uses the power of performance and creative expression to help people express themselves, analyze and understand conflicts, and work to change them. The basic belief behind the method comes from the ideas of Paolo Freire (2003) and from ancient Greek theatre and the concept of dialogic exploration of issues. Facilitators and educators coming from the outside to offer services to help the development of communities, instead of bringing a set curriculum or set of actions to take, begin by asking the people questions. Out of this comes a dialogue that leads to the creation of generative themes. These are real, important issues that the community would like to work on in order to improve their lives. DPSFM applies a performance-based approach to all of these phases. This iterative and cyclical process is presented graphically in Figure 1.

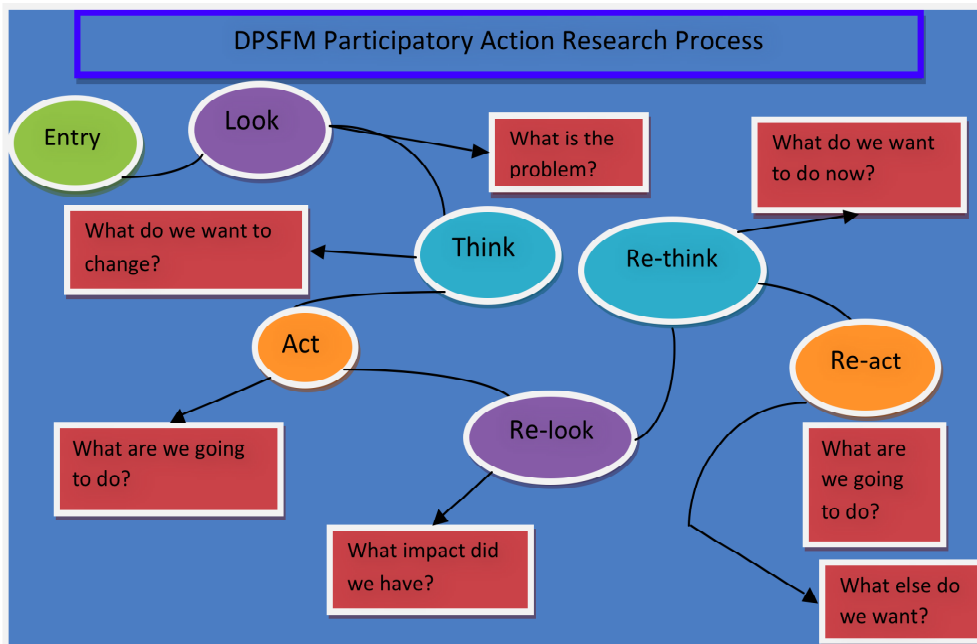


Figure 1. DPSFM participatory action research process.

Given the variety of data that can be collected in this process, technological assistance and recording can be done through Interactive Management (IM) where data can be collected and analyzed.

Interactive Management (IM)

IM adheres to three important characteristics proposed by Broome and Christakis (1988) as being necessary for a culturally sensitive methodology. The first characteristic necessary for a culturally sensitive methodology includes a holistic approach where there is “recognition of the systems nature of combinations of ideas and entities” (p. 221). Second, a process orientation must be adopted where “those who ‘own’ the issues become engaged and responsible for dealing with them, thus preventing the imposition of external perceptions on the definition ...of the...situation” (p. 221). A final characteristic that must exist is a collaborative problem-solving environment, which refers to a cooperative climate that facilitates problem solving. Because IM promotes collaboration of members in a group who share a commitment in addressing complex issues within a framework that utilizes systematic and logical reasoning, the design provides a powerful methodology to unveil the complexity involved in understanding conflict.

Since educational issues and community issues are among the most pervasive and complex issues facing societies, dispute resolution approaches merit attention for resolving these types of issues. The IM design requires individuals or stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the topic at hand, and often community members are most knowledgeable about the issues that face their own communities. The IM process utilizes individuals and groups as meaning making agents in order to gain a rich understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

Interactive Management (IM) is based on responding to the demands of complexity (Cleveland, 1973; Deal & Kennedy, 1982). The implication for using IM is that it can provide a framework for understanding how a problem in conflict is constructed, aggravated, and influenced. In the same vein, the IM framework can aid understanding resolution in a conflict by assisting groups to identify support structures that influence positive solutions and even more importantly prevention of conflict through analysis phases. IM involves ISM, which is a process that both ameliorates the complexity when there are numerous elements involved with a complex issue and also facilitates in understanding the links between elements. Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) is associated with the more global problem-solving design of Interactive Management (IM). The workshop generally begins a context statement and objective statements after an orientation and icebreaker exercise.

Participants then are encouraged to collaboratively work with a facilitator to develop the objectives of the workshop. For example, an objective could include the following:

1. To develop an “influence map” representing the interrelationships among the set of major contributors in conflict their community members face currently.
2. To engage in mutual learning that leads to increased awareness and understanding.

A triggering question usually is presented to the workshop group in the idea-generation phase. This question can be crafted from the vision statements generated from the participants.

The use of the ISM methodology is comparable to focus group sessions in several respects. First, like focus groups, ISM draws from gathering knowledgeable participants in the community or organization depending on the context. While people could critique the power of a small group, the facilitation group is valued. For example, Blumer (1969) spoke of the power of utilizing a select group. He suggested, “seeking participants...who are acute observers and who are well informed...A small number of such individuals brought together as a discussion and resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample” (p. 41).

Unlike the focus group, ISM is a computer-assisted methodology that has the advanced feature of software that uses “mathematical algorithms that minimize the number of queries necessary for exploring relationships among a set of ideas” (Broome, 1998, p. 4; Warfield, 1976). The ISM communication technology software program facilitates in what otherwise might be an impossibly complex task of organizing items into a comprehensible set of relationships. The relationship of ideas are formed and displayed as a structure:

ISM can be used to develop several types of structures, including influence structures (e.g., “supports,” or “aggravates”), priority structures (e.g., “is more important than,” or “should be learned before”) and categorizations of ideas (e.g., “belongs in the same category with”). (Broome, 1998, p. 4)

The ISM proceeds through several steps as described by Broome (1998) which involve: (1) generating and clarifying ideas pertinent to a topic via the method of NGT; (2) identifying and clarifying the “relational question” to be used for making judgments about the relationship between pairs of ideas (e.g., “Does idea A support idea B?”); (3) creating a structure map; (4) displaying and discussing the influence map; and (5) amending the map if desired by participants. Participants, with the guidance of the facilitator, vote by answering ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the relational question. The votes are inputted into the ISM program, which systematically organizes items in relation to the voting process of other items. The computer program visually displays rounds of paired items in the form of the relational question until all queries involving the relationship between items has

been completed. Subsequently, the ISM program features the influence structure so that participants can view their results. Nominal Group Technique is often utilized during the idea generation stages and it generally proceeds through these steps: (1) presentation of a triggering question, (2) idea generation of ideas, (3) serial recording of ideas presented to the entire group, (4) serial discussion of the generated ideas that allowed clarification and editing of ideas, and (5) selection by the participants of the more important items through a voting process. According to Broome (1998) the process requires approximately 5 to 8 hours of consensus activities and is relative to the number of ideas in each the set. Further, Broome (1998) suggested that “the ISM software is able to infer, on the average, approximately 75-80% of the judgments involved in relating the complete set of ideas” (p. 5). Throughout IM, facilitator participants along with the facilitator are encouraged to incorporate innovative methods for generating ideas and actions plans. Many suggestions can be drawn from Schumann’s (2005) *IAF Handbook*, which includes but is not limited to techniques such as facilitation improves imagery, graphic performance, participative learning, etc. IM is an open and fluid model, which allows application of innovative facilitation techniques and approaches within its framework.

Conclusion

It is clear that a significant goal for the scholarship of engagement is praxis. The main purpose of this paper was to offer DPSFM and IM as specific alternative dispute resolution examples for the scholarship of engagement that can benefit from communication technologies in collecting, recording and analyzing data. It has the potential to translate research into practice for the betterment of society, communities, and learning institutions around the world.

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