

## **Action Research Reflection**

W. Marie McIlwrath

March 31, 2006

While enthused about being admitted into the Creative and Critical Thinking graduate program, initially, I viewed Creative and Critical Thinking 693 as a course that would probably parallel the ideologies and practices that are part of most graduate educational programs. Suspecting that the CCT 693 focus would be on enhancing learning and teaching strategies to function better in a dysfunctional school system-which seem to institute one project after another to promote whole school changes to no avail-surprisingly, my attitude changed and my critical academic acumen broadened through Dr. Peter Taylor's introduction to and intense focus on the systematic and recursive process of action research. Specifically, through his enlightening use of Cycles and Epicycles of Action Research (Taylor, 2003), learning and functioning as an educator is no longer mysterious relative to how to think, listen, dialog, and actively research to design action and implement *real* change. My introduction to and practices in action research demonstrate that effective change not only can take place in a typically waffled educational setting, but also, for any professional and/or personal situation.

As a class, our first impressive assignment introduced us to a scenario, proposed by Dr. Taylor, challenging us to build a post-graduate constituency to promote professional and personal success within the group. Personally, I found the concept refreshing as well as stressful; however, Dr. Taylor continued laboriously to explain, give examples, inquire as to our progress, meet with and correct us-

no matter how often, in my opinion, we seemed to mis-think his teachings in this higher-ordered thinking process and deal with externalism. I learned CCT 693 is not a canned course; therefore, I began to study and read everything he gave us!

Action Research has now become an administrative life-style for me. In particular Richard Schmuck's book *Practical Action Research for Change*, teaches critical strategies for school change that actually work, and have already been put into practice in my work-a-day academic world. For example, I now see situations in which the use of Proactive Action Research is very effective and is my personal preference; nevertheless, I also understand the necessity for peer comfort in the use of Responsive Action Research who those who may resist change.

Reading Calhoun for our class in which Dr. Taylor discussed the comparison of our experience as novice action researchers to that of other sources, I realized that not all action researchers are equal. Calhoun's approach to action research was the same non-diverse approach I have witnessed for years, as an educator; subsequently, I learned that the Cycles and Epicycles approach is a more global strategy that can be made applicable to any and all situations with a component for implementation that also allows for the furtherance of knowledge, action, questions, and investigative findings (KAQF). Cycles and Epicycles is logical.

Upon reading *Action Learning- Taking the Time it Takes* by Maureen Jenkins and *Leading A Focused Conversation* by Brian Stanfield and attending a focused dialog session with Dr. Taylor, I learned the enormous importance of how thinking and expressing thoughts in a calm focused manner, probes into the mystery of problem-solving, through expressive language, previously unknown beliefs, and values

that can give clarity, exactness, awareness and richness to otherwise convoluted non-profitable thinking.

In CCT693 a great deal has been exposed and learned. By keeping a binder of all selected readings, as well as Dr. Taylor's mini lectures/lessons, samples of peer work, sources of/for research, and my own action research journal, I shall continue to learn how to enhance and evolve the quality of my own critical thinking as a process of reflection, journal entry, and dialoging with critical thinking cohorts.