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AUS W07

FAST model toward context-based design

On being an "Active Agent"

My partner has been dealing with frustrations about the level of her engagement in the community groups with which she works. She has felt that she was not as welcome to take part at the level of engagement she has desired. I asked about doing some work around these frustrations using vision and design. My partner expressed interest in having conversations with me on this topic.
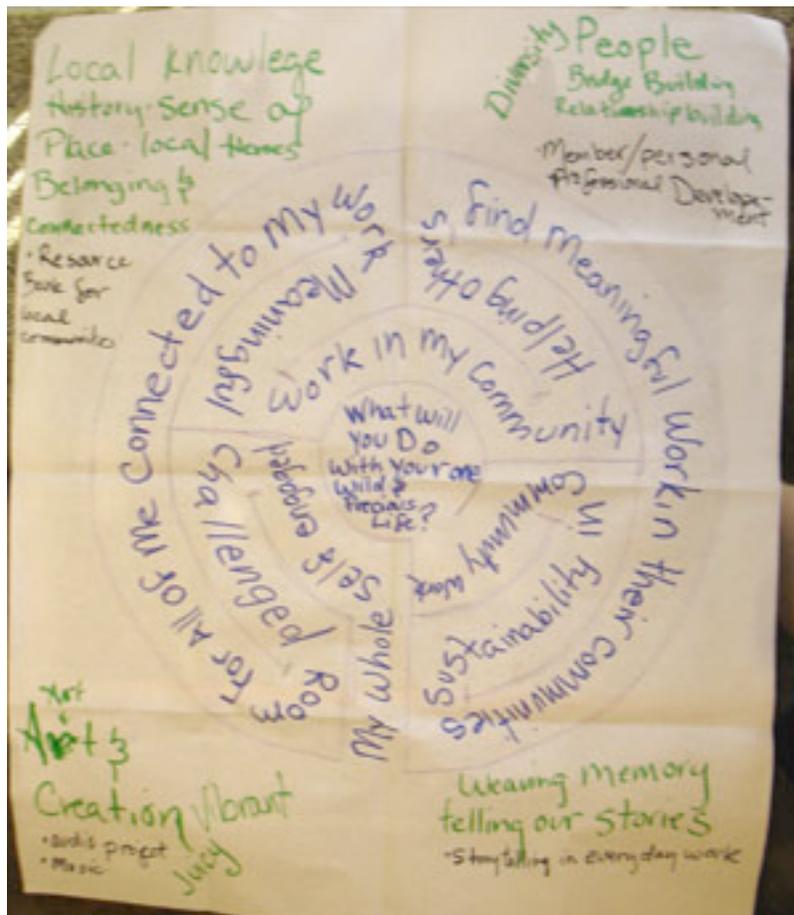
This was a wonderful opportunity that presented itself. She clearly was the right person and the right time to whom I could be in service using techniques and ideas I have been learning about this quarter. We both hoped to help her transform her work away from a feedback loop of frustration into a positive feedback loop that helped create what she wanted. My partner actively volunteered to be part of these conversations. While recognizing that she felt frustrations, we focused on developing, through ongoing conversations, a vision of what she most wanted and valued with an eye to finding how to make that positive vision more likely.

One of the first things we did was have a conversation to discover and dream what she wanted most, her positive vision of what her engagement in the community would look like. I tried to form questions that offered space for storytelling to discover her positive vision around our topic. I asked to tell me stories about her favourite moments and greatest excitements when working in community. I asked her to tell a

story about a time when she was most able to experience the level of engagement she wanted at other times. I asked if she could name or help put a finger on what it was about those moments that made those stories possible.

Inspired by our initial conversation, my partner developed a visual representation of her positive vision. She told me, "I was inspired by our conversation to do this."

When we next talked about this topic, we were able to reference her illustration. We explored how, for her, the visual representation was a chance to explore another link to her own vision of storytelling because there are different relationships between

people and the spoken and written word. Being able to take the previous conversation and create a visual representation from what was revealed to her about her positive vision was something she found very valuable and helpful. She felt a strong emotional connection to the story behind this illustration and to the story of making the illustration that she shared with me. We were both discovering our topic of choice in more depth through story.

In another subsequent conversation, my partner and I explored what this positive vision was. When I asked if she could give this role in community a name, she came to call this role being an "Active Agent" as contrasted to "Participant" in community. This was new language she hadn't used before and was the beginning of building new meaning around her positive vision.

We then explored this new notion of an active agent. I asked what an active agent was, what personal qualities did active agents possess. I also asked what an active agent did in community and how they did it. We developed an inventory of ideas around this idea of "Active Agent" in order to create a shared meaning around her positive vision of herself. I include in Appendix 1 the inventory we created.

We then related this inventory to itself to understand the relationship between how an active agent acts in community and why they do what they do. Together we realized some new and very interesting things. I include an outline of the inventory in Appendix 2.

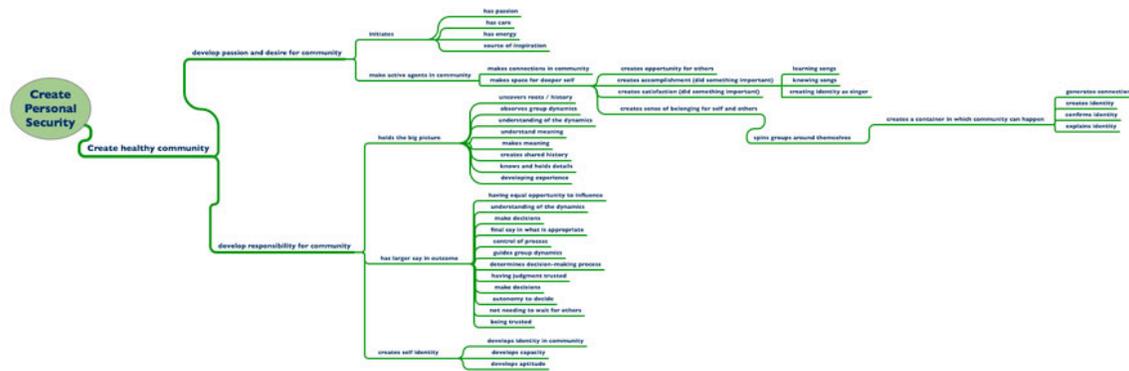One of the primary things about active agents is that they are engaged in

creating more active agents in community. They help to build more community by building more active agents. So, in order to be an active agent, we came to the realization that my partner would like to focus on creating other active agents. This realization was a clear notion of how to create her positive vision.

We also realized that the active agent is engaged in community in order to create healthy community. We further came to realize that the reason to create healthy community is to be safe as individuals in community. So, an active agent is involved in creating a positive feedback loop that reinforces community health and individual safety reciprocally. This was a realization of the importance and impact of her positive vision.

These realizations are examples of how we made meaning in order to transform both of our worlds, reciprocally with the world and each other. We created meaning together as an experience of wholeness.

We used the outlined inventory to create together an illustration of the relationship between why an active agent does what they do and how they act in community. This kind of model building is a strength that I bring as an interviewer that helped deepen our conversations and create more meaning for both of us.

In another conversation, I asked my partner to tell me stories about amazing things that active agents could do together in community and what fantastic things active agency would create for a community. We talked about these dreams of what her notion of active agency was then and have continued to have conversations about this even now. Not only did we find meaning, but also this found meaning became the basis for an ongoing process of dreaming, as, I hope, the reinforcing loop of positive vision to bring my partner out of the loop of frustration she wanted to escape.

Coming out of this series of conversations, I helped to arrange a meeting between my partner and one of the community organizers she's had frustrations from interacting with. My partner was able to have a conversation with this organizer using the language and meaning she and I had realized through the appreciative process. She told me afterward that she felt wonderful about the meeting and lucky to have had our conversations prior to it. Together my partner and the organizer were able to develop mutual understanding around my partner's participation in community and also the pressures felt by the organizer around responsibility to the community. They were able to talk about, essentially to further design, a way forward together.

Starting from a place of frustration, we were able to examine a hopeful vision for the future based on lived experience. We then created meaning from the hopeful vision in order to identify functions that would fulfill that vision. And, we took some initial steps to designing means by which those functions could be enacted.

Our conversations about a positive vision for her future self actually started to create that positive vision for her in these conversations and by being that positive vision she has engaged in transformation. We engaged in co-creative transformation with each other, in a relationship of reciprocity, that has already had a ripple effect in our environment.

Appendix 1 - The inventory

On being an "Active Agent" in community

Larger say in outcome
make decisions
final say in what is appropriate
responsibility for community
make decisions
autonomy to decide
not needing to wait for others
being trusted
having judgment trusted
having equal opportunity to influence
initiate
observes group dynamics
guides group dynamics
control of process
decision-making process
holds the big picture
details
sense of responsibility
passion
care
energy
in service to community
capacity
aptitude
experience
understanding of the dynamics
creates opportunity for others
creates sense of belonging for others
spins groups around themselves
creates a container in which community can happen
creates accomplishment (did something important)
creates satisfaction (did something important)
generates connections
makes space for deeper self
creates identity
confirms identity
explains identity
makes meaning
uncovers roots / history

creates shared history
source of inspiration
regenerative procecss

Appendix 2 - The inventory outline

On being an "Active Agent" in community

▼ Create personal security

   ▼ Create healthy community
     peaceful co-existence; safety & well-being

     ▼ develop passion and desire for community

       ▼ initiates

- has passion
- has care
- has energy
- source of inspiration

       ▼ make active agents in community

- makes connections in community

         ▼ makes space for deeper self

- creates opportunity for others

           ▼ creates accomplishment (did something important)

- learning songs
- knowing songs
- creating identity as singer

- creates satisfaction (did something important)

           ▼ creates sense of belonging for self and others

             ▼ spins groups around themselves

               ▼ creates a container in which community can happen

- generates connections
- creates identity
- confirms identity
- explains identity

     ▼ develop responsibility for community
       being in service to the community

       ▼ holds the big picture

- uncovers roots / history
- observes group dynamics
- understanding of the dynamics
- understand meaning

- makes meaning
- creates shared history
- knows and holds details
- developing experience
  having and gaining experience

▼ has larger say in outcome

- having equal opportunity to influence
  has opportunity equal to or greater than others, but not less
- understanding of the dynamics
- make decisions
- final say in what is appropriate
- control of process
- guides group dynamics
- determines decision-making process
- having judgment trusted
- make decisions
- autonomy to decide
- not needing to wait for others
- being trusted

▼ creates self identity

affirms this created identity as feedback loop

- develops identity in community
- develops capacity
- develops aptitude