

# EVERYONE'S IN THE SHOW – ACTION RESEARCH IN COMMUNITY THEATER

by

DAVID FREDERIC FINLEY

(Under the Direction of Karen E. Watkins)

## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to use action research to create enduring change in a local community theater's culture by making it more inclusive by giving the community a stronger voice within the organization. Three research questions framed this study:

1. What informal and incidental learning do individual action research participants experience around inclusion and voice?
2. What changes are generated by the action research process in the larger board's capacity to create change relative to voice and inclusion?
3. How does an action research team's exploration of inclusion and voice impact the larger community in a community theater organization?

Findings indicated the organization examined and identified policies and procedures. It used this process to make significant changes in order for a nonprofit community theater organization to become more inclusive. It also discovered how the organization develops voice for members and participants through inclusion. The organization not only received positive feedback from the community, but also learned where it needs to focus its efforts.

The results suggested the action research process is transformational for organizations and can have long-term success. The organization realized success when leadership committed itself to developing a highly inclusive culture. The action research process provided avenues to develop the leadership needed to help an organization reach its goals.

This study determined the organization changed at the board level through action research. Implications exist for the board to use action research to change the culture for the members, supporters, and other stakeholders within the organization. Lastly, this study discovered an interest for further exploration of how informal and incidental learning relates to transformative learning.

**INDEX WORDS:** Action Research, Community Theater, Inclusion, Voice,  
Informal Learning, Incidental Learning, Organizational Effectiveness

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## DEDICATION

To

Miriam Marie Finley, Mason Alan Davis, and Hannah Elizabeth Finley

My lovely bride, my son, and my daughter,

I am eternally grateful for your emotional support and sacrifice by allowing me the time to complete this study. I hope you will continue to learn, love, and help those around you.

John H. Finley, Stephanie Gold Finley, and John Benjamin Finley

My father, mother, and brother,

Your love, prayers, and support through this process were vital in helping me serve other people. Through your efforts, I learned more about what we are supposed to do and in the process found peace.

My many aunts, uncles, Cousins, family, faith family, and friends

For the interest, support, and encouragement you showed along the way. Your prayers, thoughts, and words of encouragement kept me going when I needed it.

“If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you are to the people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person.” - *Fred Rogers*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

On a warm July evening, in the Fine Arts boardroom at the local university, volunteers of a non-profit community theater organization in a rural part of the southern United States met for a regular monthly board meeting. Near the end of the usual discussion about the upcoming production, the meeting moved onto new business. One member took the opportunity to voice concerns she was hearing from the local community. According to her, community members did not feel fairly represented onstage and within the organization. She surmised people were growing tired of seeing the same group of people in leading roles. Consequently, she added, when board openings occurred, the organization filled them with those people who were cast in plays and the community came to see the organization as “cliquish” along racial lines. Looking at the racial makeup of the board, she could see the community’s point.

While many on the board understood the complaint, some even going as far to say, “I have heard that complaint for forty years,” members felt the organization offered the community many opportunities to participate. Board members stated that because community members did not take advantage of these opportunities, they took themselves out of the system. A few on the board pointed out that Southern Performers, Inc. (SPI) was making improvements in this area by choosing an African-American to direct the upcoming production. The discussion drew long into the evening with many members offering their opinions, but in a normal board-like fashion, members appointed someone to look into this situation and report back to the board at the August meeting. The meeting then adjourned.

At the August meeting, the board awaited its designee's report. He realized he did not have enough information to report on the project and promised to have more in September. The board moved on. At the September meeting, the board tabled the issue because the project manager was not there. He would be busy for the next two years earning a master's degree and would not be able to give the project his full attention. By October, the board pushed this project into its long-term goals, a growing list of forgotten projects. Meanwhile, the community still grumbled.

### **Issue Identification**

The scenario above may sound familiar to anyone who is involved in an organization comprised of volunteers. Indeed, it is a scene from a 2009 board meeting of SPI. A member did voice the community's concerns, the board handled it in the exact manner, and the community still grumbled. Many authors (Anderson, 2010; Burke, 2008) claim organizational culture, such as SPI's, is a culprit of problems. SPI's culture of nominating board members from those it chooses for major onstage roles created the problem. Bringing the community's concerns to the board every so often, waiting for a board member to head it up, and then allowing the problem to fade into unaddressed long-term goals compounds the issue. SPI's culture never really addressed the community's concerns.

In May 2010, I began this study to try to understand better SPI's problem with its community. Using action research, I wanted to see if the organization could actually change to include the community, give it a voice, and keep that voice in consideration throughout the organization. In doing so, I encountered both those within the organization and those outside

affected by the SPI's mission. In order to maintain anonymity, I changed the names of the organization and the participants I encountered throughout this study.

### **The People of SPI**

The cast of characters, all listed as pseudonyms, for this study include: Devon Braxton – SPI's only current African American board member and the first African-American president in its history; Ralph Malick – SPI's current Vice President of Production and fine arts teacher at Southern State University (SSU); Stella Harper – board member, biology teacher at SSU, and wife of Ralph; Emily Goran – board member, chemistry teacher at SSU, and good friend with Stella and Ralph; Jack Parsons – board member, SPI's former Vice President of Finance, and SPI's longest serving member; Ingrid Stephan Douglas – board member and SPI's main supporter of its children's theater and workshops; Dinah Moore – board member and employee of an international volunteer housing organization headquartered in SPI's hometown; Helen Parker – board member and retired teacher who volunteers her time as a swimming instructor; Charles Bigelow – board member who works as a park ranger at a local Prisoner of War museum; Tim McFeely – board member; Bob Kressler – board member and SPI's long-standing Treasurer; Pete Speight – board member and owner of a successful local pub; and myself – SPI's recently elected Vice president of Finance. I work as the program chair for the culinary arts department at the local two-year college.

In addition to these board members, SPI recently added four new board members in the 2013-2014 fiscal year. They are: Wayne Demming – a graduate of SSU's fine arts program, lead actor in many SPI productions, and current box office manager at the local theater downtown; Elizabeth Colter – a psychology professor at SSU and supporter both onstage and backstage of

many SPI productions; Amanda Lynch – another graduate of SSU’s fine arts theater program and supporter both onstage and backstage of many SPI productions; and Stacy Stephens – a park ranger at the local POW museum and backstage supporter of many SPI productions. Others who participated in this study include: Linda Harris – former SPI board member and President who moved to Boston before this study’s completion; Karen Cyrus – former SPI board member and President who moved to Atlanta before this study’s completion; Jess O’Reilly – former board member who elected to rotate out of the organization in 2013; and Adrianna Gould – an actress who began participating in SPI productions during this study.

## **The Organization**

SPI is an amateur Community Theater organization in a rural part of South Georgia. It serves a community that is 52.3 % Black or African American and 44.5% White or Caucasian(2012). SPI currently has 17 board members, only one of which is African-American, and one vacancy. The 2013-2014 season marks its fiftieth year in existence.

In 1964, SPI set its mission as “to entertain, to provide an outlet for talent, to make a cultural contribution”(SPI, 2011). The success of this mission belongs to the effort of the organization’s volunteers. From its origins at a board member’s house in 1964 until now, SPI relies completely on volunteers for leadership, operation, production, talent, and backstage help. Most of the current 17 board members have full-time employment elsewhere, yet, they still find time to keep SPI a vital organization in the community.



## **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to create enduring change in SPI's culture by making it more inclusive by giving the community a stronger voice within the organization. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) and Stringer (2007) described action research as using collaborative, democratic, and scholastic methods for involving those affected by change into creating such change. This process helps make change more meaningful and sustainable. Using action research, I wanted to create lasting change in SPI's culture by making it more inclusive and giving the community a stronger voice within the organization.

### **Research Questions**

Action research authors (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Stringer, 2007) recommended using action research to help an organization change. In designing this study, I saw opportunities for participants to experience informal and incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). Finally, because this study originated with the concerns of the community, particularly in terms of inclusion and voice, I wanted to see how SPI's adoption of action research would affect the community. Based on the purpose of this study, the research questions are:

**RQ1** What informal and incidental learning do individual action research team members experience with inclusions and voice?

**RQ 2** What changes are generated by the action research process in the larger board's capacity to generate change relative to voice and inclusion?

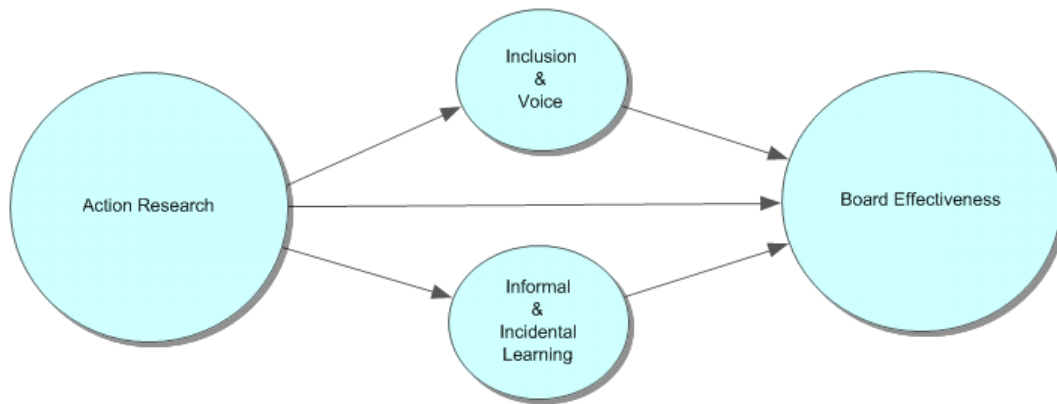
**RQ 3** How does an action research team's exploration of inclusion and voice impact the larger community in a community theater organization?

## **Theoretical Basis for This Study**

Because SPI needed help in changing its organizational culture, I based this study deeply in action research, an evidence-based approach to changing systems. Not only is action research (AR) the best fit for allowing the organization to understand better the need for changing its culture, but also it has the benefits of being a scientific method for creating change (Burke, 2008; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) while providing the opportunity to improve the quality of lives for the organization, community, and individuals (Stringer, 2007).

Another component of this study is the community's need to be included in the organization. The lens of inclusion and voice spoke to this need. While simply adding diversity does not have a significant impact on board effectiveness (Brown, 2002; Siciliano, 1996), Davidson (2011) it does detail how an organization can leverage diversity to create a more inclusive culture by bringing more diverse points of view to the board.

A final aspect of this study is informal and incidental learning. As participants explore new contexts, they begin the process of learning through interaction with other participants or through working within the system (Marsick & Watkins, 2001). This learning has an effect on board effectiveness. Table 1.1 diagrams this study's theoretical framework.



*Figure 1.1* Theoretical framework.

Action research uses inclusion, voice, and informal and incidental learning to improve board effectiveness. Likewise, action research has a direct influence on board effectiveness.

### **Significance**

This study is significant for three reasons. First, it involves research within a community theater organization at the board level. Initial literature reviews revealed authors who conducted research in community theater with participants on the stage (Donoho, 2005; Kramer, 2006); however, very little research exists about leadership of community theater organizations at the board level. This study attempted to add to that knowledge base.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, this study shows the importance of nonprofit organizations recognizing their responsibility to help stakeholders develop and maintain social capital. SPI discovered it has hidden opportunities to help those who participate as audience members, actors, backstage helpers, or board members create better, stronger lives for themselves and others. This study is an example for other organizations, corporate or nonprofit, to realize the sometimes marginal effects they have on stakeholders.

## **Conclusion**

SPI has been addressing the issue of inclusion and voice over its 50 year history; however, this action research study was the first time the organization employed a scientific approach. SPI needed to change its culture and action research was the best method for facilitating this change. AR involves members of the organization in research, investigation, intervention, and facilitation of change. In doing so, it affords members the opportunity to connect to the issues more deeply and help guide change throughout the organization more thoroughly.

This study had 21 members interact through the AR process to create change in the organization. It also discovered how informal and incidental learning influenced the change process. Finally, this study explored the interaction and effect the organization has with and on the community as the organization progressed through action research. This study created positive change toward inclusion and voice throughout the organization.

This study is significant because it combined organizational effectiveness at the community theater board level. Researchers have studied these areas independently, but there is little research combining the two. Furthermore, this study is an example of how informal and incidental learning uncover other areas for the organization to consider. SPI found how it interacts with the community in peripheral ways. The effect it had on stakeholders in this manner was no less important in working to achieve its mission.

The following chapters detail the literature surrounding board effectiveness, incidental and informal learning, and inclusion and voice. They also explain the action research methodology, data analysis measures, and limitations. They continue to tell the story of SPI's progress through this study and describe the findings the organization discovered through its participation. Finally, this study offers conclusions and implications for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature integral to this study. My research included over one hundred journal articles, dissertations, and books detailing topics relating to community theater, organizational effectiveness, inclusion and voice, and informal and incidental learning. I used data resources such as Galileo, EBSCO, ERIC, Google Scholar, and the U.S. Public Library System to find theoretical and empirical literature.

Many community theater organizations are nonprofit organizations. As such, community theater experiences the same effectiveness issues as do other nonprofit organizations. For many nonprofits, effectiveness of the board determines the effectiveness of the organization (Brown, 2000). The best way to determine board effectiveness is to conduct board self-assessments. Of these assessments, the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ) allows nonprofit boards to compare themselves throughout the six dimensions of effective boards (Jackson & Holland, 1998).

Through informal learning, the members of the organization use the culture and experience they gain through their participation to construct the organization socially (Bolt, 2008; Doornbos, Simons, & Denessen, 2008; Seufert & Meier, 2013). Socially constructing an organization is a troublesome concept when the board makeup is not diverse. The social construct becomes homogeneous (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013). Informal learning has a narrow scope in organizations where members are from similar backgrounds (Seufert & Meier, 2013).

Until members create new triggers for learning, the cycle will repeat and the organization will have difficulty changing norms (Ellinger & Cseh, 2007).

Many organizations assume simply addressing diversity by championing minorities in leadership positions will effectively create an inclusive climate throughout the organization and radiate into the community. Literature suggests this practice is the wrong approach (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013; Brown, 2002; Sabharwal, 2014; Siciliano, 1996). To create a more inclusive organization, leaders must leverage members' differences to understand its social mission. Furthermore, when organizations view diversity more deeply they begin to have multiple viewpoints on which to make more inclusive decisions (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013; Brown, 2002; Sabharwal, 2014; Siciliano, 1996).

### **Board Effectiveness**

Most community theater organizations are nonprofit organizations; therefore, understanding characteristics of nonprofit boards was an important component of this study. Much research has been done on nonprofit organizational (NPO) effectiveness. Most studies of board effectiveness stated that it is a significant contributing factor to organizational effectiveness (Brown, 2000; Herman & Renz, 2000; Jackson & Holland, 1998; Pahl, 2006). Still more research finds self-assessment to be good indicators of identifying strong and weak dimensions of board effectiveness (Brown, 2000; Herman & Renz, 2000; Jackson & Holland, 1998; Pahl, 2006). Although there is consensus on these the relationship between board and organizational effectiveness and using board self-assessments to determine board effectiveness, findings indicated that board composition does not impact board effectiveness as much as expected (Brown, 2000; Siciliano, 1996). Furthermore, nonprofit board effectiveness cannot be

accurately measured with one single instrument (Herman & Renz, 1999, p. 110). Fluctuations among organizational structure, focus, and mean make the evaluation process difficult. Other dimensions complicating the matter are deciding from which perspective to evaluate: externally, internally, financially, or procedurally (p. 111).

Adding to this confusion is the commitment levels of and the manner in which the organization educates board members (Penn, 1991); therefore, board effectiveness is a product of social constructs, thereby making it difficult to evaluate. Effectiveness, under this theory, depends upon stakeholders' interpretations. Stakeholders decide which dimension to evaluate and how much weight each factor carries which can be difficult as they approach the organization from different perspectives, with different agendas, and with different expectations. It is necessary to determine stakeholders' understanding of the NPO to evaluate effectiveness. (Herman & Renz, 1999; Pahl, 2006). This study used the BSAQ to evaluate board effectiveness.

### **Theoretical Framework for This Study**

This study based its framework for understanding board effectiveness in the theories of Jackson and Holland (1998). Their study identified six dimensions of best practices of effective boards in nonprofit organizations. They used data from observations and critical incident interviews from members of effective and ineffective organizations in order to isolate the elements of effective nonprofit boards. They found effective boards are *contextual*. They understand and take into account the culture, norms, and values of the organizations they govern. They are also *educational* in that they take necessary steps to ensure members are well informed about the organizations and the professions working there as well as the board's own roles, responsibilities, and performance. Effective boards are *interpersonal*. These boards nurture the



development of their members as a group, attend to the board's collective welfare, and foster a sense of cohesiveness. Another characteristic of effective boards is they are *analytical*. They recognize complexities and subtleties in the issues they face and draw on multiple perspectives to dissect complex problems and synthesize appropriate responses. Effective boards share a *political* characteristic. They accept as one of their primary responsibilities the need to develop and maintain healthy relationships among all key constituencies. Finally, effective boards are *strategic* because they envision and shape institutional direction and help ensure a strategic approach to the organization's future (pp. 160-161).

Using these six dimensions Jackson and Holland (1998) developed the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ) to measure board effectiveness accurately. The questionnaire offers Likert-type questions in random order tying into each of the elements of effective nonprofit boards. Jackson and Holland (1998) considered conducting the questionnaire through a structured face-to-face interview with each respondent in order to have a richer field of data. Expense and logistics presented a major challenge to the feasibility of this method. Jackson and Holland (1998) recommend a mailed version of the BSAQ. The mailed questionnaire is less expensive and more accessible; however, it does create challenges for accuracy and trustworthiness.

Other studies used the BSAQ to assess board effectiveness. Brown (2000) strengthened the position of using the BSAQ with his findings. He discovered effective boards that practice the BSAQ dimensions of Board Effectiveness create more effective organizations. Surveying and interviewing 56 directors and 43 board members across 214 organizations, his study identified characteristics of effectiveness of nonprofit boards and how those characteristics translated to

Board Effectiveness. Using the BSAQ, he found a significant correlation between the six dimensions of board effectiveness and “five measures of organizational effectiveness (legitimacy, number of fund sources, fund focus, leadership, outcome results)” (pp. 64-65).

In another study to determine board effectiveness, Pahl (2006) interviewed 249 human service nonprofit organizations across Kentucky and South Africa to determine 1) how organizational culture affects Board Effectiveness and 2) how the BSAQ’s dimensions relate to board effectiveness. This study compared BSAQ scores with the original average BSAQ scores. Figure 2.1 illustrates this comparison.

	Contextual	Educational	Interpersonal	Analytical	Political	Strategic
South Africa	0.67	0.44	0.61	0.57	0.65	0.50
Kentucky	0.57	0.54	0.60	0.59	0.57	0.68
Combined	0.61	0.49	0.60	0.58	0.60	0.60
Holland, et al (1994)	0.68	0.53	0.63	0.61	0.64	0.65

*Figure 2.1* Comparison of BSAQ Scores, Pahl (2006) (p. 98)

Board members found a significant impact Jackson and Holland’s (1998) six dimensions had on their organizations (Pahl, 2006) . Those organizations with a more individualist culture, in which members participated for more personal reasons saw benefits across the BSAQ dimensions with the exception of the analytical and political categories. Those organizations with collective cultures, in which members participated to further the organizations goals and traditions, had a larger impact on the strategic dimension. The organizations outside environments had a significant influence on the socially constructed cultures inside the organizations. Pahl (2006) found more individualist organizational cultures in Kentucky, a state

fairly representing a cross-section of the United States, and more collective organizational cultures in South Africa. He concluded an organization's environment that furthers this effect inside the organization has an external effect on its members.

Because SPI was located in the South, understanding Southern culture introduced this study to another consideration. Cohen, Vandello, Puente, and Rantilla (1999) provided a glimpse into how culture in the southern part of the United States influences organizations there. In one part of their study, they subjected 27 white northern males and 22 white southern males to a controlled environment, gave them a task to do quietly, and introduced an antagonistic participant into the experiment after it was well underway. This participant disrupted the session through loud, boorish behavior in increasing degrees. Researchers observed reactions of all subjects and discovered the Southern subjects initially tried to remain polite, but they eventually increased in anger. When compared to the Southerners, the Northern subjects experienced frustration, but theirs did not rise as exponentially nor did it come close to the level of the Southern subjects. Cohen, Vandello, Puente, and Rantilla surmised:

Southerners were less likely to send anger signals as conflict escalated, as indicated by their delayed, but sudden, unpredictable escalation to hostility... it was shown that southerners were less likely to perceive signs of anger in others. This lack of clarity in sending and receiving signals can have serious consequences. Conflicts in the South can bubble under the surface, only to erupt in a sudden, intense explosion that might have been avoided if participants had worked out their differences earlier. (p. 271)

Applying this theory to Pahl (2006) opened other avenues into board effectiveness in the South. If Southern board members allow issues to thrive under the surface, the organization might begin to behave in the same manner as well. Thus, board and organizational effectiveness suffers.

Other scholars concurred with Pahl (2006). Herman and Renz (2000) noted that “nonprofit organizational effectiveness is strongly related to board effectiveness” (p. 158). They also discovered most nonprofits do not meet satisfactory levels of governance and management. They interviewed 46 members of 18 health and welfare organizations serving those with disabilities. Their findings indicated effective boards conduct board self-evaluations, publish expectations about soliciting donations, and have leadership’s involvement in the nominating process for board membership (p. 156).

**The Need for Self-Assessments.** Boards should use self-assessments as guidelines for quality for nonprofits (Lichtsteiner & Lutz, 2012). Using 5-point Likert-type surveys and interviews, Lichtsteiner and Lutz’s study of 407 Swiss nonprofit organizations found 24.1% of those organizations use self-assessments regularly, 27.3% of the Swiss nonprofits use other evaluation methods (i.e. outside consultants) and 50% of the organizations use no evaluation methods at all. While half of the respondents chose no evaluation, 64% of Swiss nonprofits revealed they actually preferred to uses self-evaluations. These nonprofits reported the perceived values of self-assessments were that clear consequences result from self-assessments (4.26 mean score); those consequences are effectively implemented (4.21 mean score); self-assessments positively influence the board’s performance (4.50 mean score); self-assessments positively influence public perception of the organization (3.48 mean score); self-assessments positively influence team spirit among board members (4.42 mean score); self-assessments are filled out honestly

(4.45 mean score); and self-assessments are a reasonable instrument of governance (4.39 mean score) (p. 498).

Research found most of the nonprofits using self-assessments did so under some form of pressure, mainly from having to keep certification requirements (Lichtsteiner & Lutz, 2012). These certifications indicate to the public the organization is more trustworthy; consequently, donors readily endow more money to these organizations. Researchers, therefore, have valid reasons to question the motives and situations leading nonprofits to conduct board self-assessments and how much they actually help the organization. These same researchers also discovered that organizations using self-assessments as a diagnostic tool see positive improvements in board effectiveness.

### **Board Effectiveness Summary**

Most nonprofit organizations do not operate as effectively as they could (Lichtsteiner & Lutz, 2012). Many boards choose to increase effectiveness by adding diversity. This practice rarely provides significant improvement (Herman & Renz, 2000), which, when compounded by the physical location of the organization (Cohen, et al., 1999), can extend or increase the severity of issues. When under pressure, organizations eagerly try to satisfy stakeholders by conducting self evaluations (Lichtsteiner & Lutz, 2012). Self-evaluations provide a catalyst to address board effectiveness. The BSAQ provides feedback across six dimensions of board effectiveness (Jackson & Holland, 1998; Pahl, 2006). The BSAQ helps the board become more effective helping the organization become more effective (Brown, 2002). Table 2.1 summarizes the literature for Board Effectiveness.

Table 2.1. Board Effectiveness Literature

Author(s)	Purpose	Methods	Sample	Results
Brown (2000)	To investigate board performance , political character of the board, and four dimensions of organizational effectiveness	Survey and follow-up interviews	N=56 directors and 43 board members across 214 organizations	<p>Board performance positively linked to dimensions of organizational effectiveness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fund development, leadership, and outcomes</li> <li>• Negative to legitimacy</li> </ul> <p>No improvement when adding diversity</p> <p>No negative influence on relationships when adding diversity</p> <p>Recruitment positively affects board performance; as does political character</p>
Herman & Renz (2000)	<p>To determine if nonprofit effectiveness is related to board effectiveness.</p> <p>To find recommended board practices for board effectiveness</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Analyzed by board practices</p>	N=46 health and welfare and 18 organizations dealing with serving those with disabilities	<p>Important issues for boards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board self-evaluation</li> <li>• Written expectations about giving and soliciting finances</li> <li>• Chief executive's role in board nominations</li> </ul>
Lichtsteiner & Lutz (2012)	<p>To show the current state of international discussion on self-assessment</p> <p>To design the parameters relevant to self-assessment by an executive board.</p> <p>To ascertain the extent to which self-assessment is practiced by the boards of certified Swiss nonprofits and what influences self-assessment</p> <p>To discover how nonprofit boards evaluate the usefulness of self-assessment.</p>	Descriptive approach	N=407 Swiss nonprofits	<p>24.1 % uses any self-evaluation.</p> <p>27.3% use other evaluation methods</p> <p>50% to not do any evaluation at all.</p> <p>64% reported they prefer self-evaluation</p> <p>Many nonprofits believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear consequences result from self-assessments</li> <li>• Those consequences are effective</li> <li>• Self-assessments positively improve board performance.</li> <li>• Self-assessments improve board team work.</li> <li>• Self-assessments are answered honestly.</li> <li>• Self-assessments are reasonable governance instruments.</li> </ul>
Pahl (2006)	<p>To learn how organizational culture relate to org. effectiveness</p> <p>To determine if the six dimensions of the BSAQ represent a one-factor solution to construct board effectiveness</p>	Tailored Designed Model	N=249 human service nonprofits in Kentucky and South Africa	<p>Board organization scores compared with Jackson and Holland (p. 98).</p> <p>Board effectiveness is either cognitive or communal.</p> <p>Board performance is strongly affected by organizational culture.</p> <p>Communication is an important tenet of board effectiveness when introducing diversity.</p> <p>The BSAQ is a good tool to measure self-awareness</p>

Board effectiveness is closely related to the effectiveness of the rest of the organization (Brown, 2000; Pahl, 2006). The board's effectiveness is affected either by the organization's internal culture (Brown, 2000; Lichtsteiner & Lutz, 2012; Pahl, 2006) or by its external culture (Cohen, et al., 1999). Finally, scholars recommend using self-evaluations to determine board effectiveness (Brown, 2000; Herman & Renz, 2000; Lichtsteiner & Lutz, 2012; Pahl, 2006).

### **Informal and Incidental Learning**

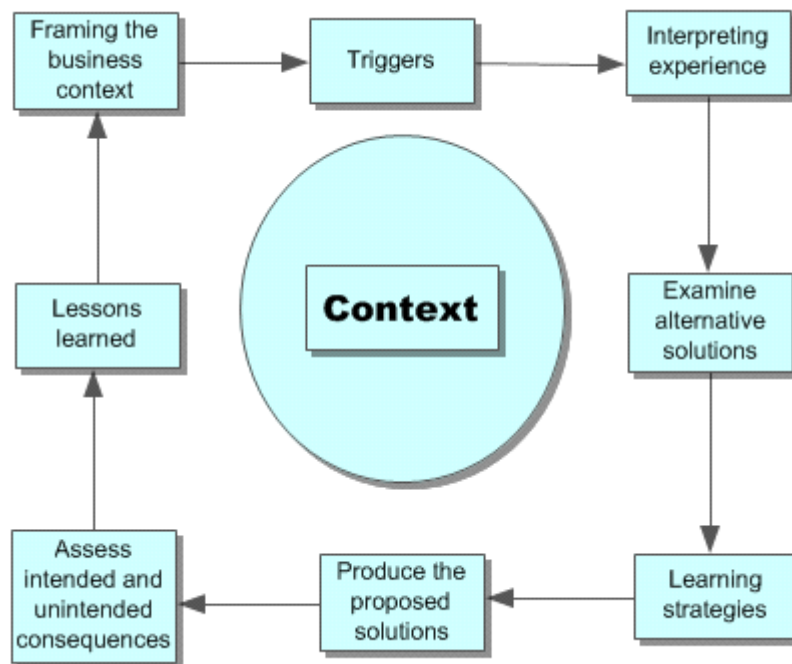
Informal learning is not necessarily structured and can take the form of “self-directed learning, networking, coaching, mentoring, and performance planning” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, pp. 25-26). Incidental learning is either conscious or unconscious learning occurring when one interacts with others or with processes. Examples of incidental learning are when learning occurs through “the hidden agenda of an organization's culture or a teacher's class, learning from mistakes, or the unsystematic process of trial and error” (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 26). When members participate in the normal functions of organization, informal learning can occur (Marsick and Watkins, 2001). Informal and/or incidental learning happens during the normal routine of doing one's job or when the organization experiences an internal or external shift. Learners realize this type of learning only when they take the opportunity to reflect upon this shift.

### **Theoretical Framework for Informal and Incidental Learning**

Marsick and Watkins (2001) provided the informal and incidental learning framework for this study. They found that “informal and incidental learning are relevant to practice in many cultures and contexts: the private and the public sectors, hospitals and health care, colleges and

universities, schools, professional organizations, museums, religions, families, and communities” (p. 26). They noted this type of learning takes place in organizations as part of the routine or as a sudden internal or external shift in the routine. Informal and incidental learning may not be a conscious form of learning and may be a result of chance. Learners fully understand informal and incidental learning through self-reflection and through the learning of others.

Marsick and Watkins (2001) developed a model for enhancing informal and incidental learning based on theories by Dewey, Argyris and Schon, and Mezirow. See Figure 2.2.



*Figure 2.2.* Marsick and Watkins’s Informal and Incidental Learning Model as Adapted with Cseh, Marick and Watkins (2001), p. 29.



The center of the model represents the learning as people encounter a context in their work or life experiences. The outer dimension represents opportunities for insight into one's informal or incidental learning. Marsick and Watkins explain the model by stating the following:

The model depicts a progression of meaning that, in practice, is often more of an ebb and flow as people begin to make sense of a situation. With each new insight, they may have to go back and question earlier understandings. The model is arranged in a circle, but the steps are neither linear nor necessarily sequential (p. 29).

Although learning may not be sequential, Marsick and Watkins believed learning begins with a triggering event. Often, this trigger is a surprise event for the learner. Once the triggering event occurs, learners then begin the process making sense of their new situations. Here, other factors influence how individuals interpret the new context. Issues, such as social expectations, skill levels, levels of awareness, levels of motivation, or a person's emotional maturity, heavily influence the decision-making process. Once that decision is made, however, learners begin to assess the outcomes of their decision and use the lessons learned from the process to influence further learning.

The learner needs to experience three conditions in order to enhance informal and incidental learning : “critical reflection to surface tacit knowledge and beliefs, stimulation of proactivity on the part of the learner to actively identify options and to learn new skills to implement those options or solutions, and creativity to encourage a wider range of options (Marsick & Watkins, 2001, p. 30). Marsick and Watkins (2001) also offered a warning to those

facilitating this type of learning: Informal and incidental learning is not specifically a structured form of learning, for it can cause learners to misinterpret learning needs and assumptions. To overcome this problem, they suggest making informal and incidental learning more conscious and more rigid.

### **The Informal and Incidental Learning Model in Use**

Ellinger and Cseh (2007) designed their study by using Marsick and Watkins's (2001) Informal and Incidental Learning Model. They set out to discover how employees facilitate informal and incidental learning and what contextual factors contribute positively and negatively to such learning. They used semi-structured interviews with 13 employees from a customer-service, learning-oriented, manufacturing company to gather data because the company faced an external need to cut costs and an internal need to update technology and processes. Their findings, while not meant to be universal, stressed the importance of leadership and the need for environments to foster the process.

Several internal and external catalysts stimulate the learning process in an organization (Ellinger & Cseh, 2007). Participants described several themes leadership exhibited to help them learn informally or incidentally. These six categories had positive influence in facilitating learning for other members. Responses stated that an environment in which leaders seek out others' expertise, provide challenging work, provide important and critical tasks, allow workers to own their work, develop other workers, and provide feedback on performance created the best culture for informal and incidental learning (Ellinger & Cseh, 2007, pp. 441-443). Participants related many stories about their participation during the organizational change and how they learned through these occurrences. Activities, such as helping managers understand new

computer software; spending time working with a highly-visible employee on a project; or helping other employees become certified, provided opportunities for an individual to cultivate informal and incidental learning.

The employees also identified 14 different behaviors that help others learn. Many participants claimed either they used these actions to help other learn, or they learned from others use of these actions: “providing feedback; role playing; observing; listening; asking questions (the “what do you think and why investigate” questions); talking things through (explaining and seeking understanding); walking things through step by step (“you drive”, I’ll take the passenger seat); seeking others for knowledge or additional insights as needed; sharing materials and resources; removing obstacles; broadening perspectives; being a role model; and focusing on the big picture” (Ellinger & Cseh, 2007, pp. 443-444). Participants noted these behaviors, either by themselves as facilitators or by their supervisors, promoted learning by opening a positive environment for learning.

There are several factors to informal and incidental learning. Ellinger and Cseh (2007) identified positive contextual factors for creating a learning environment. One is having leadership committed to learning:

The most predominant factor, learning-committed leadership/management, gets manifested in two ways: managers and leaders who role model learning and development by example (walk the walk); and, managers and leaders who encourage, support, and reinforce the importance of developing others (talk the talk). (p. 445)

Likewise, they discovered five negative factors detracting from a positive learning environment: “1) Leadership/management not committed to learning. 2) Structural inhibitors. 3) Lack of time manifested by workloads. 4) Fast pace of change is overwhelming. 5) Negative attitudes” (p. 447). Leaders not supporting facilitators and not allowing employees learn and develop are contributing factors that inhibit informal and incidental learning. The structure of the organization’s processes of requiring employees to focus on their areas only also limits learning.

In a study of five European corporations, Seufert and Meier (2013) set out to understand how learners facilitate informal learning. Through interviews with senior managers of each corporation, they found informal learning needs strong leadership to be effective, and learners usually initiate incidental learning. Seufert and Meier also identified pre-requisites for individuals, leaders, and the organizations involved in informal and incidental learning. Individuals need to be able to reflect on learning, identify learning gaps, develop trust in leaders and peers in the learning process, and have autonomy to allow them to use means most effective for them. Leaders need to create a safe environment, allow for reflection and communication provide resources, and adapt leadership styles to best facilitate learning. Organizations need to provide safe places for experimentation, resources for learning, and opportunities for communication. Seufert and Meier suggest coupling informal learning with formal learning to add complexity to the learning process. Furthermore, these corporate trainers reported informal learning is growing in importance as employees use it as the main form of learning in the workplace.

Doornobos, Simons, and Denessen (2008) used the Marsick and Watkins (2001) learning model in their study as well. They agreed that informal and incidental learning occurs through a

triggering event. This event can cause spontaneous learning, when “activities are performed with a goal other than learning in mind,” or deliberate learning, “those activities with an explicit goal of learning in mind” (p. 131). While both types of learning can occur with a triggering event, spontaneous learning is more closely associated with sudden, unexpected changes.

Dornbos et al. (2008) chose to study 473 Dutch police officers to understand better the relationship between these officers’ workplace characteristics and how they influence the officers’ workplace learning. They developed a questionnaire specific to police work with questions designed to give feedback on each officer’s personal characteristics about her or his job performance. They attached a five-point Likert scale to those questions ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. They also added questions designed to gather data on each officer’s relational and work characteristics. They graded these responses with a seven-point Likert-scale with (0) meaning never to (6) being every day. Doornbos et al. discovered six types of work –related learning. Figure 2.3 shows their findings of descriptive statistics and how they correlated to the six types of work-related learning.

Type of Work-Related Learning	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. From peer colleagues (peer)	2.55	1.02					
2. Individually (individual)	2.32	1.15	.55*				
3. From outsider (outsider)	2.01	1.06	.57*	.61*			
4. From new and less experienced colleagues (new)	1.86	.93	.65*	.59*	.64*		
5. Together (together)	2.55	1.10	.55*	.59*	.55*	.62*	
6. From expert colleagues (expert)	2.51	1.07	.60*	.50*	.46*	.58*	.55*

Note: \*p > .05; 1 = scores could range from 0 to 6.

*Figure 2.3 . Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Six Types of Work-Related Learning from Doornbos et al. (2008) p. 138.*

Each mean score indicated these officers “showed a relatively low frequency of work-related learning, with mean scores ranging from 1.86 for learning from new and less-experienced colleagues to 2.55 for learning from peer colleagues and learning together” (p. 139).

Doornbos et al. (2008) concluded work place relationships heavily influence workplace and informal learning. For instance, they described police officers becoming aware of their informal learning through “using a questionnaire as a research instrument” (p. 142). Through their questionnaire, they found the more effective methods of learning are through personal relations with those within the organization and through work-related informal learning. Participants, upon reflection through the questionnaire, identified instances in which they learned informally through personal relationships on the job and through tasks performed while on the job. Doornbos et al. recommend developing these personal relationships within the organization to facilitate learning better.

Bolt (2008) surveyed 218 and interviewed 70 members of three Australian organizations to understand how informal and incidental learning enhance members' development. The study found informal and incidental learning help members meet personal objectives as well as organizational objectives. Furthermore, participants reported this type of learning was sometimes more effective than formal learning. Bolt suggested when organizations undertake change they should not allow the organizations' objectives to overshadow the members' personal objectives. To create this climate, organizations should employ peer mentoring groups, for these groups foster informal learning. Finally, Bolt insisted organizations meet individuals wherever they are in the process of change in order to reinforce the quality of learning.

### **Summary of Incidental and Informal Learning**

The Marsick and Watkins (2001) learning model provides a thorough understanding of how informal and incidental learning occurs. It depicts a learning cycle dependent on self-reflection, that allows the learner to have input into learning, and provides a wide array of options for learning. Learning usually occurs as a result of a triggering event and follows through to new understanding of the context. Ellinger and Cseh (2007) added positive factors to facilitate learning better as well as positive and negative behaviors influencing learning. Seufert and Meier (2013) added to these pre-requisites that a leader needs to provide quality learning. While most organizations employ informal and incidental learning to help facilitate change, Bolt (2008) warned about allowing it to overshadow the individual's needs and objectives. Bolt suggested meeting learners at their positions in the learning process and allowing them to reflect and have input in the process. The individual's position in the learning process holds a heavy

influence (Doornbos, et al., 2008). Table 2.2 compiles the literature for incidental and informal learning.

Table 2.2. Incidental and Informal Learning Literature

Author(s)	Purpose	Methods	Sample	Results
Ellinger & Cseh 2007	To explore how employees facilitate others' learning and the contextual factors that influence employee's facilitation of others' learning in a workplace setting	Qualitative case study.  Critical incident technique using semi-structured in-depth interviews.  Content and constant comparative analysis data analysis	N=13	Six catalysts for facilitating learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking expertise</li> <li>• Challenging assignments/tasks</li> <li>• Critical, visible, high priority tasks</li> <li>• Turning over key project responsibilities to others</li> <li>• Wanting to develop others</li> <li>• Need for performance/feedback</li> </ul> Fourteen behaviors to facilitate others' learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing feedback</li> <li>• Role playing</li> <li>• Observing</li> <li>• Listening</li> <li>• Asking investigative questions</li> <li>• Walking through things step-by-step</li> <li>• Seeking others for knowledge or additional insight</li> <li>• Sharing materials and resources</li> <li>• Using examples</li> <li>• Removing obstacles</li> <li>• Broadening perspectives</li> <li>• Being a role model</li> <li>• Focusing on the big picture</li> </ul> Positive organizational contextual factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning-committed leadership</li> <li>• Internal culture committed to learning</li> </ul> Negative organizational contextual factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncommitted leadership</li> <li>• Structural inhibitors</li> <li>• Lack of time</li> <li>• Fast pace of Change</li> <li>• Negative attitudes</li> </ul>
Doornbos, Simons, & Denessen (2008)	To learn about the relationship between workplace characteristics and work-related learning.	Qualitative case study.	N=473 from 10 regions of Dutch police agencies	Work related learning occurs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From colleagues</li> <li>• Individually</li> <li>• From outsiders</li> <li>• From new colleagues</li> <li>• Together</li> <li>• From experts</li> </ul>
Bolt (2008)	To learn how adult learners' experiences with formal and informal learning	Interpretive study  Semi-structured interview and	N= 218 surveys and 70 interviews in	A majority of participants identified informal and incidental learning as a means of meeting personal and organizational learning needs over formal education and non-formal programs.



	synchronize to enhance development	questionnaires  Data analyzed by NVIVO7	three Australian organizations	
Seufert & Meier (2013)	How learning and development facilitators support informal learning as a mode of learning among subordinates	Case studies conducted by 5 large corporations  Each partner used intensive interviews  Constant comparative analysis	N=5	Informal learning can include interaction with leadership where leadership influence is less pronounced.  Learners usually initiate informal learning and use social technology to meet learning needs

Several factors influence informal and incidental learning. Organizations should focus on helping members learn (Ellinger & Cseh, 2007). The quality of informal and incidental learning depends on the participant's position in the learning cycle (Doornbos, et al., 2008). Members use this type of learning to meet goals and personal needs (Bolt, 2008; Seufert & Meier, 2013).

### **Inclusion and Voice**

Most organizations view inclusion as a quota system of inviting people of different ethnic backgrounds to the leadership table. Davidson (2012) suggested the quota system causes more frustration on both ends of the system, thereby resulting in failed attempts to address the problem. Instead of relying on quotas, he suggested Leveraging Difference, a concept in which organizations look deeper into the differences among its members. Not only are there ethnic differences, but also there are differences in age, occupations, backgrounds, socio-economics, and so forth. The more an organization delves into these differences, the more diverse and inclusive it becomes, and members begin to realize a true voice within the organization.

Many scholars agree. Brown (2002) and Siciliano (1996) supported the theory of looking more deeply into members' differences. Both found simply adding members based on specific

diversity does not improve organizational performance. Furthermore, adding more board members increases the chance for differences within the organization which, in turn, helps the organization focus on its social mission (Siciliano, 1996). Finally, organizations relying on a committee to address Leveraging Differences help strengthen inclusion and voice throughout the organization.

### **Theoretical Framework for Inclusion and Voice**

According to Davidson (2011), many of those championing an “admirably passionate pursuit of diversity” fall short of their intentions (p. 19). He adds the following:

Diversity celebrations abound, with ethnic food days and diversity awareness seminars peppered throughout the year. Companies use such activities to communicate that they are committed to diversity and thriving because of it. In fact, commitment frequently waivers, and more than two decades of research shows that very few organizations are actually thriving because of their diversity.

Greater diversity does not easily translate to greater excellence in performance. It takes work to make that happen. Yet many leaders are content in the illusion that symbolic activities and underfunded training classes will turn their increasingly diverse organizations into world-class performers (pp. 19-20).

Davidson concluded that these symbolic practices, while highlighting marginalized members, do not make the organization more inclusive. Furthermore, these practices do not supply the organization with sustainable performance needed to keep it viable in today's culture.

Leaders of many organizations fail at providing inclusions and voice for all members because, as Davidson (2011) contended, most organizations manage diversity. He identified the managing diversity approach as leaders viewing diversity in a "problem-focused mindset" (p. 50). Those using this approach tend to compartmentalize differences, usually based on race and culture:

The Managing Diversity frame can be described as an especially U.S. approach to difference. A great deal of the emphasis and philosophy behind Managing Diversity flows from the social, historical, and political backdrop of intergroup dynamics in the United States. (p. 50)

Leaders focusing on managing diversity view issues of diversity as a problem and revert to compartmentalized differences when trying to promote diversity. These leaders fail to realize the advantages of incorporating all parts of diversity into daily operations. Those championing managing diversity see diversity as a threat or a burden to the organization. This climate creates what Davidson (2011) called "threat rigidity" (p. 51). Threat rigidity causes stress throughout the organization, causing constraints on the way members think, feel, and act. According to Davidson, "They are less open to new information or novel ways of thinking about an issue. This makes it all the more difficult to see diversity as an opportunity" (p. 51).

In contrast, Davidson (2011) suggested a Leveraging Difference approach for organizations interested in creating a more inclusive climate and giving voice to all members of the organization. The Leveraging Difference mindset focuses on “the opportunities the difference creates” (p. 50) and includes “diversity of thought, identity, and perspective” throughout the organization (p. 52). It focuses on relationships, performance, energetic stimulation, and innovative collaboration while bringing new and diverse resources to the organization’s culture. Leveraging Difference promotes a perpetual high level of performance by providing legitimacy to teamwork.

Leveraging Difference requires a commitment to strategic focus. Davidson (2011) described strategic focus in a more competitive sense; however, leaders can apply the Leveraging Difference approach to an organization’s strategic dimension as described by Jackson and Holland (1998). Davidson (2011) suggested Leveraging Difference has a long-term positive impact on representation, organizational change, resistance to change, and education of all members in the organization. Davidson concluded that the managing diversity approach should not be completely discarded. It has its value in an organization. However, when leaders keep the Leveraging Difference mindset in focus, they not only increase diversity, but also create a more inclusive and empowering organization overall.

Davidson (2011) stated that an organization must create organizational capability if it is to leverage difference. Instead of tolerating difference, the organization needs to create a culture of living by embracing and embodying difference. Organizational capability is “a collection of knowledge and skills that are embedded in, and supported by, the organization’s people, practices, and systems” (p. 75). To create this capability, organizations can embed it into the

culture through the Leveraging Difference Cycle. The cycle has three components: “seeing, understanding, and engaging differences” (p. 76). Figure 2.4 illustrates the Leveraging Difference Cycle.

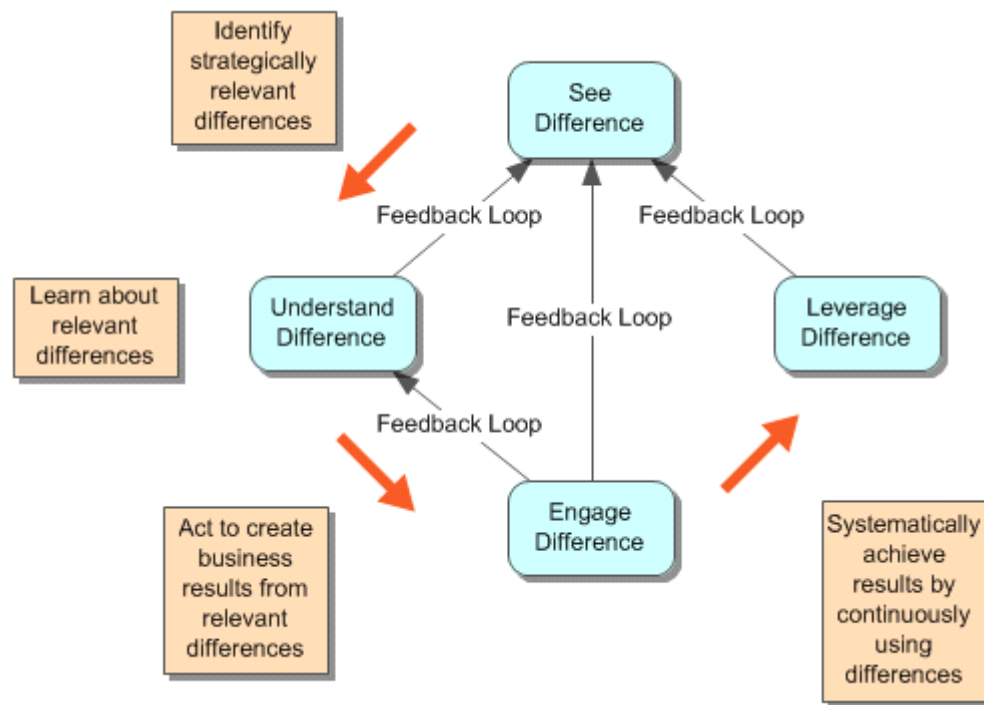


Figure 2.4. The Leveraging Difference Cycle from Davidson (2011), p. 184.

Scholars agree with the Leveraging Difference cycle. Siciliano (1996) stated that the concept of diversity, for its own sake, does not add value to an organization. Her study of 240 YMCA organizations focused on the relationship between board composition and its effect on organizational performance. She hypothesized 1) diversity in board member occupation would create higher levels of performance, 2) diversity in board member gender would create lower levels of organizational performance, 3) greater diversity in board member age would lower board performance, and 4) larger numbers of board members would increase diversity in areas of

gender, occupation, and age. Each organization she surveyed resided in the Eastern portion of the United States. The average size of each board was 23 members, the majority of which were white males from a business background and ranging in ages from 36-50. She noted three areas of organizational performance for this study: social mission, fiscal performance, and public financial support.

The study found occupational diversity had no significant effect on the organization's social and fundraising missions. Board members involved in the YMCA reported an increased "social agency mission and had higher levels of contributed revenue" (p. 1317). Likewise, the study found no significant relationship between gender diversity and increasing focus on the organization's social mission. Gender did have a negative effect on fundraising. Organizations with a large number of female board members reported a lower level of donations. Age diversity had no significant relationship to organizational effectiveness, but it did have a slight positive effect on donations. Finally, the study determined board size allowed for a larger diversity of age and occupational backgrounds but did not increase gender necessarily.

She concluded the "strongest impact of board diversity was on the organization's social performance" (p. 1318). The occupational background and gender of members helped keep the organization focused on its social mission. More diversity in occupational backgrounds and in gender allows for a higher involvement of people with different experiences and viewpoints. This concept may be the most valuable point of the study. While "diversity in any form had no impact on operating efficiency in this group of organization(s), and diversity does not appear to influence one way or another the board's ability or tendency to perform its control function" (p.

1319), it does allow for multiple perspectives to positively influence the organization's social function.

Others also concurred. Sabharwal (2014) found this type of diversity management does not produce an inclusive culture. Her study of 198 employees of Texas public companies showed strong leadership creates an inclusive environment in an organization. This study set out to understand the relationship diversity management had on inclusive organizational behaviors and how those behaviors affected organizational performance. Sabharwal hypothesized the following: “1) Diversity management positively influences organizational performance. 2) Diversity management negatively influences organizational performance. 3) Controlling all factors, diversity management has no influence on organizational performance. 4) Inclusive organizational behaviors that foster commitment from top leaders positively impact organizational performance. 5) Inclusive organizational behaviors that involve employees in individual and organizational decision-making processes positively impact organizational performance. 6) Inclusive organizational behaviors that treat employees with fairness and equity positively impact organizational performance” (p. 203). She conducted online surveys for 198 of 815 Texas state employees across five state agencies. She chose the state of Texas for it provided a “good example of a majority-minority state wherein the Caucasian population alone, not Hispanic or Latino, constitute less than half of the states’ population” (p. 204).

This study found while diversity management does have a positive influence on organizational performance, it only occurs when under the influence of other factors: “EEOC policies, linking diversity initiatives to the organizations’ strategic and performance plan, and providing several work/life balance initiatives and opportunities for informal mentoring”

(Sabharwal, 2014, p. 208) . When an organization controls these factors, diversity management is not a predictor of organizational performance. Sabharwal (2014) did found that “organizations that effectively manage diversity, commitment from the top leadership and ability to impact decisions in a work group is positively associated with organizational performance” (p. 208).

She suggested “moving beyond diversity management” to create “an environment that is inclusive for all” (p. 211). Top-level leadership needs to be committed to creating an inclusive culture, allow stakeholders to have a voice in the decision-making process, and promote fair treatment for all members of the organization. She also recommended that top-level leaders be inclusive and “empower employees so they can influence work decisions” (p. 211). This empowerment allows stakeholders to develop their fullest potential. While Sabharwal (2014) indentified implications for SPI’s study. First, SPI should look at creating an inclusive culture because it helps increase organizational performance. More importantly, Sabharwal (2014) suggested that SPI needs strong leadership to move past the diversity management practices it had been employing and develop a strong leadership incorporating organizational inclusiveness behaviors if it wishes to realize its goal of becoming more inclusive.

Likewise, Bernstein and Bilimoria (2013) concurred with Sabharwal (2014) in the need for strong leadership in order to develop an inclusive culture within an organization. Their study developed understanding of how motivations for diversity influence practices on the board and within the organization and how these practices influence members’ feelings of inclusion. Bernstein and Bilimoria (2013) surveyed 403board members from nonprofit organizations. The respondents came from organizations BoardSource identified as being “racially and ethnically diverse,”as being “people of color,” and as previously or currently serving “on one or more



‘mainstream’ nonprofit boards” (p. 642). They found members feel more inclusion when the organization shows appreciation and value for “their talents, contributions, and abilities” (p. 648) and when they can help the organization achieve the mission. Their study also discovered a need for equality throughout the organization. They stated, “[W]hen boardroom behavior focused on respect for individuals, treated all board members as equals, opened leadership positions to everyone, and did not tolerate individuals being less than decent to one another, minority board members experienced inclusion” (p. 648). They suggested a need for strong leadership in order to create this “inclusive ‘culture of diversity’” (p. 649).

Finally, Bernstein and Bilimoria (2013) coupled this inclusive culture with a long-term approach. Leadership needs to be committed to emphasizing transformation in members’ feelings and beliefs, to alleviating barriers inhibiting learning from others, and to capitalizing on the different perspectives diverse members bring to the organization. When an organization fosters learning from these different perspectives, members begin to feel more included. Bernstein and Bilimoria concluded there is no single facet leaders can use to create an inclusive culture within the organization. Rather, they should empower members to “achieve insider status, adopt resolution procedures, improve communication facilitation, foster information sharing, enhance participation in decision-making, provide freedom from biases and stereotypes, and be given a voice” (p. 649).

Others suggested these changes can have long-lasting effect in an organization. Richard, Murthi, and Ismail (2007) chose to examine existing theories about the relationships between racial diversity and organizational performance. In doing so, they also wanted to discover the relationship diversity has with organizational performance over time. They also wanted to

identify conditions affecting racial diversity and how those conditions affect performance. Finally, they wanted to examine how the external environment affects both diversity and the organization's performance. They chose to study 200 companies from 1,000 companies identified in *Fortune* Magazine in a five year period. These companies never appeared on *Fortune's* top 50 list for company performance in diversity for those years. They chose these companies "because (1) detailed demographic data on racial composition were available, (2) the companies went through an extensive, rigorous evaluation process that measured the firm's commitment to diversity issues, and (3) financial data were readily accessible" (p. 1221). Richard, Murthi, and Ismail (2007) used this data for this study.

Their study employed Blau's (1977) theory of diversity. Blau stated that homogeneous organizations do not experience a loss in productivity because members find communication and operating norms requiring minimal effort. As the organization becomes more heterogeneous it develops internal barriers to performance as members from the out groups increase. The system begins to become more inclusive again as more members from the out group enter and more opportunities for social interaction increase. In highly heterogeneous organizations performance norms return. Richard, Murthi, and Ismail (2007) found heterogeneous organizations, in the long term, "develop shared routines and practices for knowledge sharing integration" similar to those of "homogeneous groups, and since diverse groups also possess greater breadth or heterogeneity of knowledge than homogeneous groups, they tend to outperform homogeneous groups" (p. 1227). The effect of diversity is stronger in service oriented organizations than in manufacturing organizations.

More scholars added to the dialogue of inclusion. Brown (2002) investigated inclusive government practices and how they relate to board composition, attitudes towards diversity, and recruitment in nonprofit organizations. Using surveys and interviews, he drew a sample of 56 executive directors and 43 board members of nonprofit organizations. The study sought to find out how often organizations use inclusive practices and how those practices associate to the organization's age, budget, and community. Brown also assumed more inclusive boards are heterogeneous, have positive attitudes towards diversity, and use specific strategies towards recruitment. Brown (2002) surveyed executive directors and board members from 214 nonprofit organizations in the Los Angeles area, the majority of which had a strong social mission of serving lower socio-economic individuals. He asked directors of these organizations about organizational size, budget, and diversity but removed those questions from the board members' survey.

Board directors identified over 26 different categories of diversity. Although ethnicity was the major qualifier, they also identified other significant categories such as gender, disability, education, and occupation among others. The study measured responses to diversity attitudes and policies through a specific survey sent to both directors and board members. The comparison of the average scores showed that both directors and board members responded alike. Likewise, this study used a nine-item scaled survey to assess recruitment. Again directors and board members answered similarly. Finally, Brown (2002) used the BSAQ to assess inclusive board practices. Here, directors and members showed a significant difference in awareness, informational resources, and processes and structures of inclusive practices. Across the board, directors reported higher scores than those of board members.

Using these findings, Brown (2002) discovered the more board membership spans the different categories of diversity as defined by the directors, the more inclusive the board becomes. Focusing strictly on minority composition, however, does not automatically make the organization more inclusive. Brown found a strong correlation between increased attitudes toward diversity and inclusive practices throughout organizations. More specifically, many directors reported using a team to focus on diversity and inclusive practices significantly increased attitudes towards inclusivity.

Brown (2002) concluded organizations self-identifying as inclusive have several common characteristics. First, they are not heterogeneous. Inclusive organizations focus on members' different experiences, occupations, and other characteristics rather than simply on ethnicity. In doing so, board members bring a wider range of multiple viewpoints into the organization. Second, inclusive boards are sensitive to inclusive practices. The numerous differences in board members helps leadership keep the focus on inclusion as the board makes decisions. Finally, to increase this focus, inclusive organizations create teams or task forces to maintain an inclusive climate. These committees help ingrain policies and practices throughout the organization.

### **Summary of Inclusion and Voice**

Older boards tend to be less diverse. While adding diversity to the board does not necessarily make it more effective, it does aid a board in becoming more inclusive, for it allows for others to have a voice at the leadership level (Brown, 2002). Diverse organizations lose effectiveness when they begin to add members from out-groups; however, they reclaim effectiveness over time when members find ways to negotiate barriers to communication and social interaction (Richard, et al., 2007).

Diversifying the board does impact the board's social performance and affords organizations the opportunity to have a wider set of resources in the change process (Siciliano, 1996). The Leveraging Difference Model provides a way to use the existing makeup of the board to help develop inclusion and voice. Strong leadership is a pre-requisite to building an inclusive culture (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013; Sabharwal, 2014); however, once leadership does create an inclusive culture, members begin to feel more inclusive (Sabharwal, 2014).

Table 2.3 compiles the literature for inclusion and voice.

Table 2.3. Inclusion and Voice Literature

Author(s)	Purpose	Methods	Sample	Results
Bernstein & Bilimoria (2012)	To discover how motivation for diversity on the board impact organizational practices and influence members' feelings of inclusion.	Online surveys	N=403 nonprofit board members	Individuals feel most included when they perceive they are valued for their talents, contributions, and abilities to assist the board serve its mission.  When boards create a respectful and equal culture, feelings of inclusion become stronger.  Adopting a "culture of diversity" strengthens inclusiveness.
Brown (2002)	To investigate the prevalence of inclusive governance practices and its relationship to board composition, diversity attitudes, and recruitment practices	Survey, interviews	N=56 executive directors and 43 board members across 62 nonprofits	Assessing board dimensions of effectiveness are a good way to identify needs.  Older organizations have larger boards that are less likely to be diverse.  Board composition has very little influence on board effectiveness.  Recruitment strategies have a significant influence on board effectiveness. But it requires clear communication of responsibilities.  There is a connection between board and organizational effectiveness
Richard, Murthi, & Ismail (2007)	To determine how diversity theories occur in organizations.  To discover and contribute theory toward the long-term effects of diversity.  To explore the role the environment plays on diversity and how that	Analysis of Fortune diversity survey of firms over a six year span.	N=200 of 1000 firms not making the Fortune's Top 50 list for diversity performance during any of the past 10 years.	There is a need to explore the theory of diversity and productivity.  Diverse groups outperform homogeneous groups in terms of integration, knowledge sharing, and productivity.  Service industries experience stronger benefits of long-term diversity.

	diversity contributes to performance.			
Sabharwal (2014)	To determine the effect diversity management has on organizational inclusiveness.	Online survey	N= 198 of 815 employees of Texas public agencies.	Organizations are more inclusive when creating an inclusive environment.  Creating an inclusive requirement requires leadership.  Members need empowerment to allow them to contribute to fullest potential.  Members need to be included in decision-making to feel included.
Sciliano (1996)	To investigate how board composition affect effectiveness. Also, it develops a diversity index and investigates its relationship to social and economic board performance	Survey, telephone interviews	N=240 YMCA organizations	No significant relationship between diversity and operating efficiency.  Mission was enhanced by equalizing gender but financial efficiency decreased  Age had no effect on efficiency but did positively on financials.

Although adding diversity has no relationship to effectiveness (Siciliano, 1996), it does provide the organization with a wider variety of input (Brown, 2002; Richard, et al., 2007). Organizations with leadership focusing on inclusion create a stronger culture where members become more effective (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013; Sabharwal, 2014).

## Conclusion

SPI already identified an issue with board effectiveness back in 2009. Despite research findings, board members thought simply adding diversity to the board would solve the problem. The literature suggested SPI would benefit from using the BSAQ to help it first understand strengths and weakness in board effectiveness (Pahl, 2006). Once the board becomes more effective, it should translate to a more effective organization.

The literature review concluded that the board needs strong leadership with an emphasis on incidental and informal learning and creating a learning environment that provides for reflection and that fosters interaction among participants. SPI should allow the participants to

implement interventions as it affords individuals opportunities to learn. The organization should also provide a wide range of opportunities for participants to learn. Building upon these theories creates different facets for this study. Participants interpreted the data for a stronger learning experience. Finally, this study should not force informal learning on any participant. SPI should meet participants at whatever level of learning they currently occupy.

To develop inclusion and voice, this study adopted the Leveraging Difference model (Davidson, 2011), which called for working with those already in the organization to educate them on the purpose for this study and by providing them means with which to accomplish those goals. Leveraging Difference helped change the organization's culture. Once the culture changed, members began to make decisions through the lens of inclusion. Leveraging Difference appears to be the best way to accomplish SPI's goal of inclusion and voice and was the approach this study used.

Chapter 3 details this study's methodology and the use of the action research process. Chapter 4 tells the story of SPI as it negotiates change to become more inclusive. Chapter 5 records the findings SPI discovered. Finally, Chapter 6 lists the implications and recommendations for research.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

This study's purpose was to create lasting change in SPI's culture by making it more inclusive and giving the community a stronger voice within the organization. The study was guided by three research questions: 1) What informal and incidental learning do individual action research team members experience around inclusions and voice? 2) What changes in the larger board's capacity to generate change in vision and overall decision-making relative to voice and inclusion are generated by the action research process? and 3) How does an action research team's exploration of inclusion and voice impact the larger community in a community theater organization? This chapter explores this study's methodology, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, data trustworthiness, and study limitations.

#### **Study Design**

This study used Action Research (AR) as its main design. Stringer (2007) introduced AR as a "systematic and rigorous inquiry or investigation that enables the nature of problematic events or phenomena" (p. 4). AR is a process whereby the researcher does not conduct the study alone. She or he uses a democratic process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Hilsen, 2006; Stringer, 2007) of members within the organization to conduct research, implement interventions, analyze data, and evaluate the change. This study used this democratic process throughout the processes of data collection, intervention implementation, and data analysis.

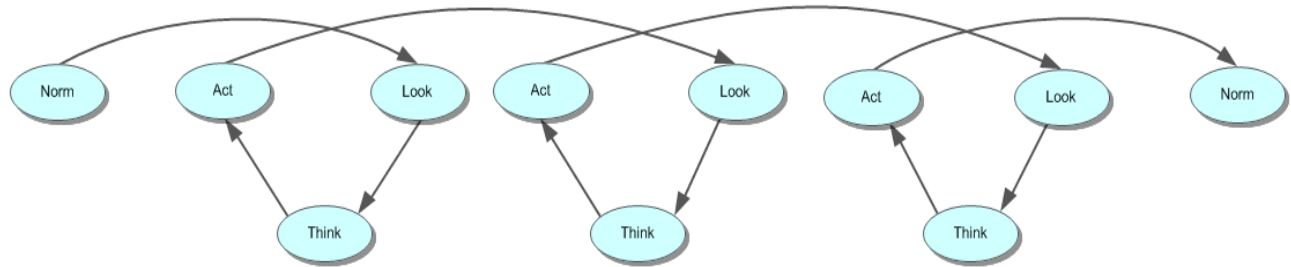


## **Action Research Methodology**

Action research differs from traditional research by opening itself to collaboration of the researcher with those being studied. Gergen and Gergen (2008), surmised that AR practices break away from individualistic vision in which the researcher gains knowledge of the problem without allowing those being studied learning as well. AR, they continue, emphasizes collaborative inquiry whereby the researcher and participants learn about the problem together. Stringer (2007) supported applying AR instead of more traditional scientific methods to understand better the “problematic events or phenomena” inherent in social behavior (p. 4). Because of the “problematic phenomena,” many other forms of research have difficulty addressing the issues as well as AR can. Stringer contends AR accounts for this phenomena: “Action research, however, is based on the proposition that generalized solutions may not fit particular contexts or groups of people for the particular dynamics at work in a local solution” (p. 5). The AR process allows all participants to understand the problem better, identify and implement interventions, and facilitate change. In collaboration with the researcher, participants in an AR study have more inclusion and voice in the change process.

Action research is a cyclical process allowing those involved many opportunities to affect change in their organization. Stringer (2007) identified three routines occurring in each cycle: look, think, and act (p. 5). In the look phase, participants gather data or relevant information and try to define or describe the issue. During the think stage, members analyze the data and begin to interpret or explain the issue. In the act stage, they develop and implement the intervention and evaluate the results. Figure 3.1 illustrates this cycle. In this study, the process occurred in three

cycles – cycling first through taking to the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire culminating in a board retreat.



*Figure 3.1. Stringer's Action Research Interacting Spiral*

While AR appears straightforward, it is not. Participants may work ahead or step back at any point throughout the process. Stringer (2007) cautions this spiral is not linear:

As experience will show, action research is not a neat, orderly activity that allows participants to proceed step-by-step to the end of the process. People will find themselves working backward through the routines, repeating the processes, revising procedures, rethinking interpretations, leapfrogging steps or stages, and sometimes making radical changes in direction. (p. 9)

Because of this back-and-forth propensity of the learning cycles, the researcher needs to be aware of his or her position in the study. In this study, I held the position of facilitator, lead researcher, lead observer, and lead analyst. As such, I tried to gather the input of others as much as possible. The collaborative nature of AR brings many different beliefs, motives, and politics to the process (Herr & Anderson, 2005). In this mixture of personal interest, it is easy for the researcher either to add to or be influenced by the masked or overt intentions of the study's

participants. Torbert et al (2004) described this balance as needing to “impartially observe the storm going on outside and the storm going on within” (p. 17).

There are insights into how to negotiate this storm. Coghlan and Shani (2008) noted the challenges an action researcher faces while conducting AR in his or her organization and offered skills to help the researcher survive those challenges. They divided this strategy into three practices: first-person, second-person, and third-person voice (p. 644). First-person voice allows the researcher to reflect on how personal beliefs and assumptions influence the researcher’s actions in the study. Second-person voice provides the researcher opportunities to develop the research community within the organization and to use this collaboration to facilitate the study. Third-person voice moves the researcher beyond the previous voices to make a contribution to the wider system. This wider system could be the organization as a whole, the community, or other organizations in the system. Action researchers face three dilemmas: pre-understanding, role duality, and organizational politics. Coghlan and Shani (2008) proposed pre-understanding includes the researcher’s:

knowledge, insights, and experience before they engage in a research programme.

The knowledge, insights and experience of insider-researchers apply not only to theoretical understanding of organizational dynamics, but also to the lived experience of their organization. It is a blend of experiential, presentational and propositional knowing. (pp. 646-647)

Role duality includes how well the researcher incorporates her or his normal roles in the organization with those roles of being an insider action researcher. Here, Coghlan and Shani stated, “Insider action researchers are likely to encounter role conflict in trying to sustain a full

organization membership role and the research perspective simultaneously” (p. 650). The problem for insider action researchers in trying to balance role duality is that the demand for performing organizational and research responsibilities may cause researchers to “feel as an outsider in both roles” (p. 650). Organizational politics include the dynamics inherent in performing action research in the organization. Coghlan and Shani described AR as being political to the extent organizations may consider it subversive. As the AR process progresses, it stresses listening to those with lesser voices in the organization, questioning practices within the organization, championing organizational democracy, and strengthening all members of the organization (p. 650). These practices can be at least controversial and, at most, subversive. Either way, they bring strong political dynamics into play.

To combat politics, Coghlan and Shani (2008), suggest skills for the researcher to successfully move through the three different levels. First-voice skills for pre-understanding include the researcher questioning his or her assumptions and utilizing self-awareness reflection. First-person voice skills for role duality encompass the researcher catching and dealing with her or his responses to conflicting demands within the organization. First-person voice skills within organizational politics call for the researcher to recognize the political climate while remaining authentic to the study. Second person voice skills for pre-understanding ask the researcher to use collaboration to inquire, intervene, and test assumptions and inferences. Second-person voice for role duality requires the researcher to negotiate roles with others, especially the researcher superiors within the organization. Second-voice skills suggest the researcher rely on planning and performance to negotiate organizational politics. Third-person skills for pre-understanding need the researcher to link theory to practice. Likewise, third-person skills for role duality

require the researcher to link theory to role duality. Finally, third-person skills link theory to political experience (p. 645).

Keeping these levels of practice and skill in mind, I actively sought to become a better researcher. First, I enrolled in several courses in action research from a major university known for its renowned advances in action research and organizational development. These classes helped me better develop the first-, second-, and third-person voice skills needed for this study. I also attended an action research workshop with David Coghlan, a leader in the action research field. I was able to ask several questions about my study and to hear his first-person experience in conducting action research. I included several members of the organization on the AR team in order to aid me with my role duality and organizational politics. The team members helped me interpret data, gave feedback, and provided different views of the organization. Team members also provided invaluable help in facilitating interventions throughout the study. I worked closely with the organization's leadership throughout this study and was able to discuss developments daily with SPI's president and many other key individuals who were on the AR team. Finally, I dialogued with my major professor in order to help me understand my assumptions and reflections about the study. She helped me navigate the political and ethical environments I encountered along the way.

While action research is a highly democratic process allowing the participants of the study to plan, implement, and interpret the study's findings, it has limitations as well. First, many in the field do not accept AR as being as scientific as traditional research. Merriam (2009) explained those subscribing to positivist research search for what is "observable, stable, and measurable" in research in which researchers can replicate the same study and find the same

results (p. 8). AR has a more post-positivist view whereby the truth is more interpretive. Merriam explained, “Reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researchers do not ‘find’ knowledge, they construct it” (pp. 8-9). AR’s democratic nature invites many interpretations of the truth which positivists do not view as valid.

This problem with validity can hamper an AR study as well. Without the “actual truth” positivists seek, action researchers have difficulty comparing their findings and strategies against norms. Maxwell (2005) stated:

Many qualitative proposal writers make a mistake of talking about validity only in general theoretical terms, presenting abstract strategies such as “bracketing,” “member checks,” and “triangulation” that will supposedly protect their studies from individuality. (p. 107)

The lack of planning for validity creates issues for action research within the scientific community. This study employed multiple sources of data and the action research team to interpret and provide feedback for this data to ensure trustworthiness.

## **Qualitative Research Methods**

Qualitative research, according to Creswell (2009) is:

A means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions or procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data

analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of data. (p. 4)

Adding to this definition, Merriam (2009) stated qualitative research is “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). To understand how participants make meaning, Merriam identified four characteristics of qualitative research. First, qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding. Through the lenses of “constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism, qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 14). Here qualitative research attempts to understand how people make meaning and sense of their experiences.

Another characteristic of qualitative research, according to Merriam (2009), is the researcher is the primary instrument. While in AR the researcher uses a democratic process to facilitate the study, she or he is still the main driver. From data collection and analysis to observing and interpreting interaction, the researcher is the best instrument in the study. Merriam, however, did identify a problem with this concept: the researcher needs to recognize his or her own biases, beliefs, or emotions involved in the study in order to minimize their influence.

The third characteristic of qualitative research is it is an inductive process. The researcher may wish to undertake a qualitative research study in order to “build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). In this way, qualitative researchers add to theory or attempt to explain

existing phenomenon. The final characteristic is qualitative research offers rich description. Instead of reporting numbers to verify findings, qualitative research tells the story those numbers represent.

### **Research Design Rationale**

As a long-time member of SPI, I know of the history of the problem. Many times members tried to address the issue of inclusion and voice within the community only to have it continue. I wanted to see if this study could help SPI begin to address the problem in a more formal manner. I wanted to balance theory and practice in the organization. I also realized the organization wanted a democratic solution to this social problem. I understood the system better than an independent researcher. As I began to learn more about AR I began to see how it could benefit SPI.

Being on the board of directors, I learned action research would allow me to best serve the organization. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) said that a key component of AR is being an insider action researcher because the researcher conducts first-, second-, and third-person research in an organization. (p. 112). He or she uses pre-understanding (first-person) to engage practical issues of concern in an organization (second-person) while generating theory and understanding from the experience (third-person). AR provided me with the opportunity to use my knowledge of the organization and, using the existing culture of the organization, affect change and understanding while adding to theory.



## Sample Selection

Southern Performers, Inc. (SPI) commissioned me to conduct this study. SPI is a community theater in the Southern part of the United States. The organization recently celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> season. SPI wanted to increase inclusion and give the community voice, a problem it has been addressing from the first few seasons. While mostly all board members participated in this study, four board members and the researcher, formed the AR team which was the engine for this study.

I selected this site for simple reasons. First of all, I was a member and knew the other members. Second, I could negotiate organizational politics with minimal frustration to the other members of the organization. Finally, I chose SPI because theirs was a real problem they had been trying to improve for many years. I felt this location fit the purpose and was convenient. Merriam (2009) agreed that these two sampling practices are normal in qualitative studies. Purposeful sampling “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight” (p. 77). The researcher must select a sample that will provide the most conducive participants. Convenience sampling is selecting a “sample based on time, money, location, availability of sites or respondents, and so on” (p. 79). This organization and the people serving on the AR team fit all the criteria in Merriam’s definition.

This study used board members as participants. SPI had 14 board members during the majority of the study. However, several board members came into and left the organization during this duration of this study. Although there were 14 board members, not every board member participated in every intervention. This matriculation occurred on the AR team as well. We originally had 5 board members plus the researcher; however, one team member moved and

we did not replace her. Because of the matriculation on the board, 16 people participated in this study.

### **Data Collection**

Just as Merriam (2009) suggested, I, as the researcher, collected the data for this study. I used memos, personal reflections, notes and recordings from board meetings, and team meeting notes and recordings. Furthermore, interventions such as archive searches, surveys, board feedback, and community feedback provided more data.

### **Board and Team Meetings**

The board allowed me to record each board meeting. In addition to recording, I made personal field notes about nonverbal signals I witnessed and about certain statements board members made. I used these notes to follow up with board members for clarification. I personally transcribed every recording for this study. I did not trust a service to record accurately what I witnessed and transcribing for myself was less expensive. I also did the same for AR team meetings. I recorded the dialogue and made personal notes. I then transcribed each recording and followed up with members for clarification.

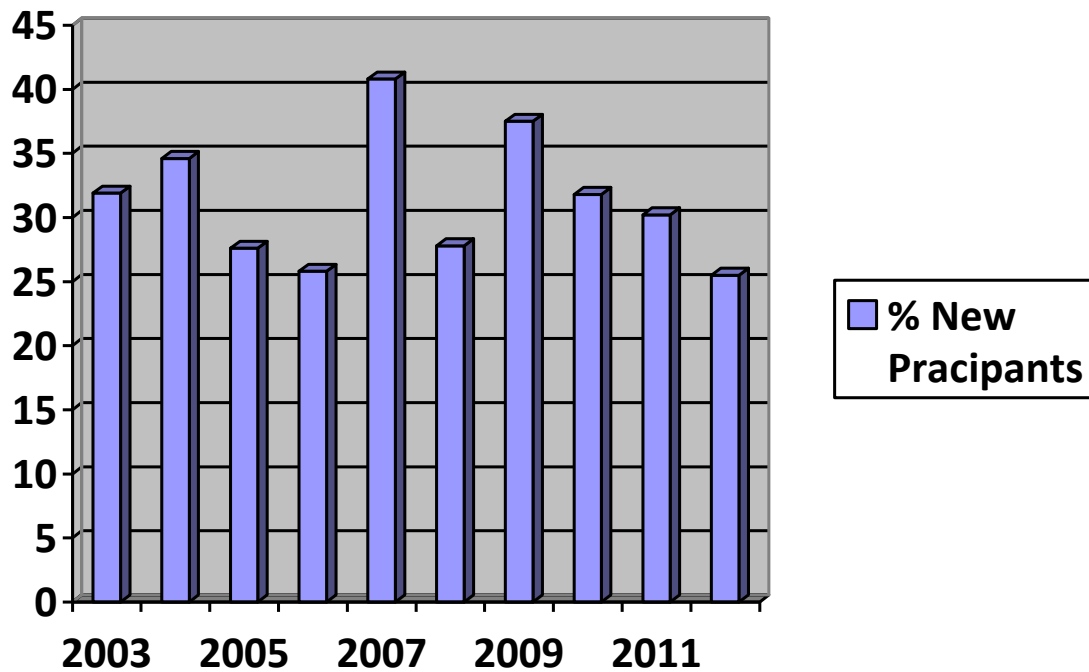
From these transcripts, I was able to see where to look for other areas of the organization for data. For example, during a 2010 board meeting, Linda stated SPI's problem was that "the community does not see itself represented onstage or in the organization." This statement led me to conduct an archive search into SPI's past members on the main stage productions to find evidence to support the community's position.

Other comments during board and team meetings sparked other data searches as well. Following Linda's comment, Jack insisted SPI dealt with the problem of inclusivity in the past by always being open in its casting practices, but never was able to find traction. His statement led me to search the minutes of the organization's minutes from 1964, the year SPI formed, to the present. Indeed, I found evidence of SPI hearing the same comments from the community as early as 1965. These transcriptions proved valuable in helping the intervention team find data to research the problem.

### **Archive Search**

The archive search into SPI's past main stage productions yielded interesting results. Although they were incomplete from 1964 to present, I went through the online archives to determine how many new people joined SPI either as an actor, musical director, choreographer, or director for the first time. Records were incomplete from 1965-1978. Beginning with the data from 1979, I recorded the names of new people in these roles on a spreadsheet and plotted them on a graph to show the percentage of new people who participated in main stage productions for SPI. In addition to the incomplete data for 1965-1978, the archival data missed the following years: 1997, 1998, 2001, and 2002. Because of those omitted years, I chose to use the most current, uninterrupted data: 2003-2012. The data showed SPI averaged 31.36% in new participants on main stage production over the past ten years. Table 3.2 shows this graph.

Table 3.2. New Participant Percentage from 2003 – 2012



What this graph does not depict is the progress SPI made between the 2011-2012 season and the 2012-2013 season, the year SPI's intervention occurred. While the ten year cycle showed a 31.36% new participant rate, the 2011-2012 season scored 25.6%. At the end of the 2012-2013 season, SPI's new participant rate was 35.9% and ranked third of the years shown in the graph. Although 2012 -2013 score shows improvement, there is not enough information to tell whether this study influenced the increase.

## The BSAQ

The action research team wanted to ascertain the current state of board effectiveness and chose to administer the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ). I asked for and received permission to conduct the survey from the authors. I handed copies out to each member at the board meeting and personally handed copies to those not in attendance. Of the 15 surveys distributed, I received 11. I tabulated the scores and identified where SPI scored high and where the organization scored lower on the BSAQ. Using a Likert-type scale, I categorized the scores according to Pahl (2006). I then compared SPI's scores to Jackson and Holland's scores found in Pahl's (2006). The team used the BSAQ results in order to plan an intervention with the board. I recorded and transcribed the dialogue from this intervention as well. Table 3.3 shows the results of SPI's BSAQ with those in Pahl (2006).

Table 3.3. SPI BSAQ Findings

Dimension	Contextual	Educational	Interpersonal	Analytical	Political	Strategic
SPI Mean	.66	.55	.68	.67	.62	.58
BSAQ Mean	.68	.53	.63	.61	.64	.65
Definition	Understanding culture, values, missions and norms of the organization	Communicating organizational information, roles and responsibilities, and performance criteria.	Development of members as a group, collective welfare, and cohesiveness.	Understanding and using multiple perspectives for negotiating the issues	Developing relationship with key constituencies.	Envisioning and shaping organizational direction with regards for the future

The results showed SPI scoring lower in contextual, political, and strategic areas. After seeing these results, the team also wanted to focus on the lower educational score as well. While SPI's

score in this area was slightly above normal, members felt the organization lacked in board member education and this lack could be causing the problem with the community's perception. As such, education would be a main cornerstone of the board retreat.

### **The Board Retreat**

The action research team used the information from the BSAQ to plan the board retreat. Emily and Stella, both university professors, wanted to have each member take a topic and limit it to 50 minute segments. Their reasoning for the time limit came from their experience with teaching in the classroom and through the research their studies provided. They said they found that having a time limit to be most effective in their work.

The team decided to divide the day into five segments. I would give a recap of the study and discuss the findings the team had at that point. Devon would instruct the board on inclusion and how SPI can improve. Emily chose to have the board reconsider how it considers membership and Stella wanted to direct the board's attention to exclusive language and practices within the organization. These practices, outlined within SPI's by-laws, contributed to the community's perception of SPI. Finally, Ralph championed educating the board and developing a means by which members help members learn about SPI. The retreat lasted four hours and generated 95 pages of transcription.

### **Community Feedback**

The board wanted to gain feedback from the community. To produce this information, we provided a simple comment card for audience members to complete after a performance of excerpts from three plays from different cultures during SPI's annual awards ceremony. I took

this feedback and compiled the comments for each play. I shared these with the AR team and later the general board.

Another, unsolicited, important piece of data came from the community in the form of a letter to the local newspaper. An audience member of one of SPI's seasonal productions provided positive feedback about the organization's efforts in inclusion and voice.

### **Critical Incident Interviews**

Finally, I conducted critical incident interviews with all four members of the AR team and three members of the general board. I recorded and transcribed each interview. Again, the reason I chose to do the transcription was to become more familiar with the data and to reduce my costs.

As is typical in action research, I used multiple forms of data collection in this study. Merriam (2009) said, "Data in grounded studies can come from interviews, observations, and a wide variety of documentary materials" (p. 30). Maxwell (2005) agreed and encouraged us to expect data collection to be a messy process:

The point I want to emphasize here is that the methods you use to collect your data (including your interview questions) don't necessarily resemble, or follow by logical deduction from, the research questions; the two are distinct and separate parts of your design. This can be a source of confusion, because researchers often talk about "operationalizing" their research questions, or of "translating" the research questions into interview questions. (pp. 91-92)

The data from this study came quickly and from multiple sources. The study generated over 500 pages of data.

### **Data Analysis**

I used constant comparative analysis to analyze data. Merriam (2009) said the constant comparative method is a reliable way to analyze qualitative data: “It is my position that all qualitative data analysis is inductive and comparative. I thus draw heavily from the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a means for developing grounded theory” (p. 175). However, she warned that the “constant comparative method is inductive and comparative and so has been widely used throughout qualitative research without building a grounded theory” (p. 175). In an effort to strengthen the quality of data analysis, I tried to have the action research team, and later a research tool, help me in the constant comparative analysis of this study’s data.

### **Data Preparation**

I recorded audio of each board and action research team meeting, the board retreat, and each critical incident interview and personally transcribed each recording. Although I initially began the transcribing process myself in an effort to reduce expense, I found this process to be tedious and time consuming. In an effort to speed up the process, I used a dictation program, Dragon Dictate, to help with transcription. It did help speed up the transcription process, but the process was still time-consuming. However, personally transcribing the data allowed me to become more familiar with and to have a better understanding of the data. I stored this data as electronic copies in subfolders of my Microsoft Word program in folders and subfolders in an effort to organize it.



After the transcription process, I purchased a license for HyperRESEARCH, a program to help me analyze qualitative data. Using this research tool, I was able to reduce the data by identifying codable passages from the transcribed data, creating codes for categories, and copying the results in a text file for later use.

### **Data Familiarization**

I became extremely familiar with the data through the transcription process. I was able to see patterns and codes and could begin to identify themes and support for the research questions. I also made notes and generated questions for follow-up or clarification with participants. The transcription process accounted for a large amount of this study's time, but it was incredibly valuable for data familiarization.

### **Data Coding**

I initially developed codes based on this study's research questions. I used these codes as I reviewed the data personally, the team reviewed the data, and then I used the HyperRESEARCH tool to review the data again. Throughout the process, I developed sub-codes for each code as the data dictated. Finally, I had to recode in order to create more meaningful codes that more clearly supported the research questions and authentically reflected the data.

### **Generating Meaning**

I used the HyperRESEARCH tool to refine the data. I was able to create a master document for each research question as well as master documents for other data. As I re-examined the data, HyperRESEARCH let me remove unnecessary input and create a more concentrated and focused set of data. HyperRESEARCH closely follows Ruona's (2005)

manual grouping method, but it is less time consuming. The HyperRESEARCH tool assisted me in reducing and combining the data from multiple sources.

### **Data Trustworthiness**

Stringer (2007) defined trustworthiness as when data and outcomes “do not merely reflect the particular perspectives, biases, or worldview of the researcher and they are not based solely on superficial or simplistic analyses of the issues investigated” (p. 57). Merriam (2009) adds triangulation helps the researcher increase credibility of a study. She defined triangulation as “the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings” (p. 215). Maxwell (2005) said a researcher should not be as concerned about creating trustworthiness as he or she should be concerned about reducing threats to trustworthiness; namely reducing researcher bias and reactivity (p. 108). This section describes how this study employed triangulation of data collection sources, methods, and evaluation wherever possible to increase trustworthiness and to reduce threats to validity.

#### **Triangulation of Sources**

This study used multiple sources of data. Surveys, transcripts of meetings, researcher’s notes, and critical incident interviews all provide avenues for triangulation. Data were analyzed consistently across all data sets and convergence among the data sources was confirmed.

#### **Triangulation of Investigators**

Anderson (2010), Burke (2008), and Coghlan and Brannick (2010) recommended using teams or groups within the organization to facilitate change. The team’s main function is to help conduct research, analyze data, and develop an intervention. I chose to use the team as a means

to inject validity into this study. The group offered other thoughts or ideas on the study. I also used this group to negate my influence as the researcher. I wanted to ensure my personal thoughts and beliefs would not override the data uncovered. I also wanted to have the team provide their influence and experience in the study. This team dynamic provided an adequate system of checks and balances for me, the researcher.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I have been a board member of SPI for eleven years. Although I am on the board, I am not a typical theater enthusiast. I rarely go see a production unless I am intrigued by the play itself. Furthermore, I am more conservative in my political views than my fellow board members. I find myself more to the “right” on political issues and have a hard time understanding the other side. As such, I saw and heard my fellow board members say things and exhibit behavior that surprised me. This behavior affected how I interacted with the board. I found myself remaining quiet when discussions trended toward issues and the liberal views appeared to be those of the majority. The largest roadblock to this project was overcoming my conservative feelings in order to interact with members on their level. In the past, I tried to brush off comments and attitudes some exhibited at board meetings. Such actions were harder for me to understand coming from a group purported to be more understanding than most; therefore, I had to find a way to circumnavigate my own biases in this area.

As I explored my position in this study, I found several personal characteristics influencing my interaction. I am a white, middle-class male from the Midwestern part of the United States. As such, I was not exposed to issues concerning inclusion in the same context as have those from the community in SPI’s area; consequently, I had to negotiate through several

unfamiliar issues. In the Midwest, I saw news items on television that depicted racial conflicts but thought that those were not real because they were “there” and not “here.” Then, when I moved to the South in 1991, I was “there.” I was intimidated and unprepared to cope with what I witnessed on television; ergo, I was somewhat nervous about addressing this issue of racism. I wanted to serve this project to the best of my ability without adding to the tensions I felt, albeit to a lesser extent, after twenty-three years.

Another characteristic that had the potential to influence this study was my military background. I completed the U.S. Army’s Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) while at Texas Tech University. Upon graduation, I attended Officer’s Basic Camp at Ft. Lee, Virginia and was then assigned to a battalion in the South. My military experience molded me into seeing absolutes in many issues. As I learned throughout this AR study, very few absolutes exist in the civilian world, and I needed to make meaning in a different way.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for me as the main researcher for this study was my political views. I tend to believe in personal responsibility. I believe able-bodied people have a responsibility to support themselves with as little government help as possible. This belief is perhaps my strongest one and I know it colors my initial thoughts. Because of this issue, I tend to minimize other people because I do not see them owning their responsibilities or actions. I learned some people may not have the same background as do I and, therefore, may not be as equipped to accept responsibility or to even realize they need to do so. This newfound enlightenment is really changing the way I view people; however, it is still the strongest issue for me to understand and I still have trouble with it.

My affiliation with SPI gives me what Merriam (2009) described as an “emic perspective” (p. 29). As an emic researcher, I know the SPI’s organizational system and know the people who are the organization. From this perspective, I have an advantage in knowing where to look and whom to ask for data collection. While this status is an advantage, I am limited as an emic researcher as well. Because I am aware of the problem as a member of the board, I have the potential to allow the study to slant toward the organization’s desired outcomes for this study, even if the data does not support those outcomes.

### **Study Limitations**

This study has limitations. Firstly, this study examined only one community theater organization in the South; therefore, the reader should not assume it applies equally to other similar community theaters. I encourage other researchers to use an action research study with other community theater organizations in the South and across the country to learn if action research is beneficial when applied in the theater field. Secondly, the sample of participants for this study was small. Less than 30 people participated in this study. Again, it would be interesting to see how a larger theater community responded to action research. Finally, my positionality as a researcher, board member, and community outsider limited the study. I continually had to find ways to limit these characteristics from influencing the results.

## Conclusion

Action research was the best design for this study for it incorporated collaboration of the organization's members with the researcher (Gergen & Gergen, 2008) accounts for social behaviors and allowed for the research to envelop the data instead of forcing data into the research (Stringer, 2007). Action research is both cyclical and multi-directional. It allows for events to occur without completely disrupting the flow of research (Stringer, 2007). Action research's collaborative process brings different perspectives that can be disruptive (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The researcher needs to know her or his position (Torbert, et al., 2004) and practice first-, second-, and third-person voice to negotiate these issues (Coghlan & Shani, 2008). Action research lends itself well to qualitative research because it helps it make meaning, uses the researcher as its main instrument, and develops through inductive processes (Merriam, 2009).

As a member of SPI, I became an insider action researcher (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). In this role I used first-, second-, and third-person skills to help SPI better understand the problem and facilitate change. I used SPI's infrastructure of board members as a sample and an intervention team comprised of board members to help collect, investigate, and interpret data. Finally, I tried to keep my positionality from unduly influencing the study.

The following chapters tell the story of SPI as it progressed through its action research study. They describe the team's dynamics and interventions. Then they detail the findings and relate them to the research questions. Finally, they summarize the findings and list the implications for further research.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Story of Action Research and SPI

SPI struggled with the problem of inclusion and voice for many years. As recently as 2009, the board tried to address this problem in the same way by nominating someone to head up a committee to find solutions, an all-too-familiar practice for the organization. In 2010, I asked the board to allow me to use action research to help SPI find a better solution to the long, ongoing issue of inclusion and voice. As I began to learn about Action Research (AR) in my doctoral program, I saw how it could possibly help SPI by adding a more scholastic focus. I would be introducing literature and research into the problem which SPI had never tried before. In reviewing the literature, I discovered a gap in using AR with theater organizations. Not only would this study be helping the organization find new and scholastic ways to address issues, but also it would be adding to the field of AR and theater.

#### **SPI's Action Research Team**

Action research allows participants of the study to have input into its design, intervention, and data gathering and analysis. To accomplish these tasks, I comprised a team from SPI's board. This team would be responsible for helping me conduct the study. Furthermore, as an emic action researcher with SPI, I would be guiding the team through the AR process. I would provide the team with data, literature, findings, and ideas for interventions. I also hoped to see significant change not only with the organization's goals, but also with my personal and professional goals. In an effort to protect anonymity, all names from this point are pseudonyms.

Anderson (2010), Burke (2008), and Coghlan and Brannick (2010) recommended using teams or groups within the organization to facilitate change. Since October 2011, members of

the board met to steer this project. The original five members who volunteered for the team were the then current president, a past-president, and three general board members, one of which was the board's sole African-American member. While there was no formal requirement for team membership, I wanted people on the team who would have a direct interest in the success of this project. Stringer (2007) agreed the "major attribute is the extent to which a group or individual is affected by or has an effect on the problem or interest" (p. 43).

The team's main function was to help conduct research, analyze data, and develop an intervention. The team became self-directed as defined by Anderson (2010). Although self-directed, the intervention team had a difficult start. The first team meeting occurred October 2011. It occurred twice because members could not synchronize schedules. The first run of this meeting occurred with one member at a coffee shop to introduce this project. The majority of the rest of the team experienced the same briefing the following Tuesday at St. Mary's Catholic Church. The sole African-American member of the team, Devon Braxton, did not attend either briefing. Originally, I thought he was not participating because he did not feel comfortable. In talking to him privately, however, I learned he had prior seasonal commitments lasting until December. The team did not meet as a whole until February 2012. The full research team met for three meetings between February 2012 and May 2012. One member, Linda Howard, left in May to have a baby. She then resigned from the board for she was moving to Boston. The team did not replace her.

The final makeup of the team consisted of Devon Braxton , SPI's sole African-American board member, Stella Harper, immediate past-president of SPI, Ralph Malick, husband to Stella and SPI's Vice-President of Production, Emily Grayson, an SPI board member at large, and



myself. Stella, Ralph, and Emily are professors at the local university. Stella teaches biology, Emily teaches chemistry, and Ralph teaches theater. Devon currently teaches culinary arts at the local technical college.

The intervention team started slowly; however, it gained momentum as members began to meet on a regular basis. The team was an excellent example of Tuckman's theory of group development (Anderson, 2010). Members exhibited the typical phases of forming, norming, storming, and performing. Unlike, Tuckman's theory, this group chose not to adjourn. The most exciting facet of the group dynamic was that the team wanted to continue in some capacity, acting as a monitoring agent for SPI.

**Team Dynamics** Since June 2012, the AR team met eight times. The team followed Tuckman's (1965) theory of group development. Members went through the forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjournment stages.

**Forming.** The group experienced an intermittent forming stage. Members, for several reasons, had trouble committing to the study at the onset. Anderson (2010) offered the following explanation for the difficulty the group had forming:

Team members explore initial interactions with one another in an "orientation" period as they begin to build relationships. There is generally a low level of trust and high anxiety and confusion about the group's purpose and objectives. There are likely to be conversations about expectations, group rules, and structure. Communication may be guarded, exploratory and cautious. Disagreement is rarely expressed. The group is generally highly dependent on the team leader,

who is usually unchallenged, and members usually consent to what the leader says. (p. 225)

From the beginning intervention meeting the team listed several issues they encountered as members of SPI. Emily saw the project as understanding stakeholders. She suggested SPI “get in touch with stakeholders. We are blind as to who we serve”. Stella thought diversity was a key component. She stated that diverse populations in the community do not come together very well and this lack of cohesiveness filtered into SPI. She surmised, “SPI needs more diverse and more committed people in order to survive.” Ralph initially wanted the project to address educating the community as to what SPI does as an organization.

By November 2011, the team changed the focus of the project into community concerns. When talking about diversity, Linda said she did not feel the community was “contemplating diversity of Southern Performers” rather it did not “feel they are represented by the organization.” Ralph added that the community may feel “theater is an elitist activity.” I suggested the board consider these issues as symptoms of a larger problem and the team try to uncover the causes of these symptoms. I presented the team with Jackson and Holland’s (1998) Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ). The BSAQ is a self-assessment indentifying the six dimensions of highly effective boards. After explaining the questionnaire to the team we decided to conduct the BSAQ in December 2011 to discover what dimension our board members see as needing improvement. This meeting was the last one until February 2012. The team could not

meet because of the holiday season. I scheduled a meeting for January, but we had to cancel because of the lack of participation.

The initial lack of cohesion subsided after the team analyzed the results of the BSAQ. The board identified a large gap in the SPI's strategic dimension which described the extent to which members develop and shape the organization to meet future needs (Pahl, 2006). The dialogue during the May 2012 team meeting began to include addressing that need with an intervention. Stella wanted to see this project create a board member manual describing board members' roles and responsibilities. Ralph suggested a mentoring program for new board members. Another topic discussed was inclusion and voice. The team wanted to show stakeholders and the community it was addressing their concerns in this area. The team decided to conduct readings of cultural plays during the annual meeting. Those in attendance would provide feedback for those readings and the team would use this feedback to inform the board. However, one of the most important suggestions from this meeting occurred near the end. Stella asked Devon, "Would you consider becoming our next president?" The suggestion of SPI electing its first African-American president showed the team's commitment to creating a better environment for inclusion and voice.

**Storming.** Anderson (2010) described the storming phase of group development as having the potential for conflict:

Members begin to express disagreements with one another and with the leader as members feel more comfortable and safe with the team. Emotions may run high as members have conflict over goals, roles, or group values. Group cohesion may

give way to subgroups or coalitions. Previously agreed-to group norms or rules may be broken. Members may try to negotiate the conflicts, work through them and move on to the next stage, or they may become mired in unhealthy conflict. (p. 225)

While the team did not have conflicts on the surface, one event between two team members did create potential for derailment. In July, SPI elected Devon to the position as President. His election was a significant achievement for this study for Devon became the first African-American president in SPI's history. Devon had also been a previous student of Ralph's and the two developed a good relationship. Devon committed to helping Ralph do a play at the university because he was currently unemployed and had the time to help.

In August 2012, Devon began to work for the technical college and regretfully withdrew from the university production. Ralph grew resentful and angry at Devon for leaving the project. His main concern was the university's theater department, a major source of SPI's talent and support, would pull its support. Ralph felt Devon, as the president of SPI, placed the organization in a compromised situation. The team also felt this conflict. Devon talked to Emily, who said to him, "I'm good friends with both Ralph and Stella and understand where he is coming from. But I see your side, too. You have to work, especially since you have been out of work for quite awhile." She advised Devon to talk to Ralph. Devon asked me for advice. I saw this situation differently. After seeing the results of the BSAQ, I associated the misunderstanding to the current state of SPI. The board identified SPI's educational dimension as lacking. This conflict occurred

because SPI assumed Devon knew the political relationship between the organization and the university and expected the president to guard the relationship. I suggested Devon talk to Ralph and explain his position. Devon did call to try to talk to Ralph several times; however they never were able meet. I expected this conflict to surface during later team meetings.

**Norming.** The two team members did not allow this conflict to affect the team. In spite of Devon and Ralph avoiding the issue between them, we were able to come together during the norming stage. Anderson (2010) predicted this cohesiveness:

The group attempts to manage some of its conflicts by coming to an agreement on group norms, roles, goals, and more. There is increased cohesion and a return to the harmonious climate of the first stage, but with increased trust, cooperation, and commitment. The team generally begins to focus again on task achievement with less dependency on the leader. Conflict management techniques are now used effectively, and individuals are free to express their opinions. (p. 225)

The team began to have a deeper understanding of the results of the BSAQ. After comparing SPI's results to the results in Pahl (2006), members were able to compare SPI with other nonprofits. Emily and Ralph concluded the intervention needed to address strategic and educational dimensions.

In August 2012, Devon was in the midst of directing a play for SPI. Because of his involvement with the intervention team, he chose to open dialogue with the cast. He facilitated a

discussion about SPI's initiative to address community concerns and asked each member to talk about their concerns. He discovered some very powerful emotions and asked me to attend a rehearsal so I could meet these people and learn about SPI.

On Sunday, August 12, I attended the rehearsal. The entire cast was not present. I met two cast members and a stage hand and described our project to them. I detailed SPI's efforts in facilitating change in how it negotiates conflict and inclusion and voice as it tries to become more effective. Devon asked Adrianna to repeat her experience to me. The first words she spoke to me were, "I feel y'all are giving me back my life." She went on to describe how her nasty divorce and custody battle left her jobless and living with her sister. These events made her lose confidence. However, the audition experience began to trigger feelings of confidence again. She described attending the audition:

I walked in and saw the same old people that are always onstage and I turned around and walked back out. I called my sister. She told me to get back in there and try. I was so excited when you, Devon, called me and said I got the part! And as I got into rehearsals, I realized that I can do this. This has given me my life back! I am beginning to feel like myself for the first time in two years.

Then we heard from Andrew who is majoring in nursing. After his experience in a recent SPI production, he is considering majoring in acting. He echoed Adrianna's experience in finding himself and uncovering a new passion for acting that he never would have found without participating in an SPI production. At the August 2012 team meeting, I asked Devon to talk about the encounter. He relayed Adrianna's story and the team decided to make it a component of the intervention. Emily stated, "I think it is important the board understands how we affect

the community. We assume we give to the community by giving out this product. But the process is important to the community as well.” The team felt it important for the board to understand this responsibility it assumed in producing plays and decided upon a board retreat for the intervention. This understanding is an important consideration for community theater groups (Donoho, 2005). The agenda for the retreat would include inclusion and voice, policy, attracting and retaining membership, and education.

**Performing.** Anderson (2010) characterized the performing stage as the following:

Team members find synergy and begin to find repeated and successful ways of interacting to achieve group goals. Team members have clarity and agreement on goals, roles, and working processes. The team begins to see a period of high productivity and accomplishment of their objectives as energy is devoted to work tasks. The team monitors its own results and evaluates its own effectiveness, discussing problems and identifying opportunities for improvement. Team leaders more frequently delegate or leave routine decisions to the group (p. 226).

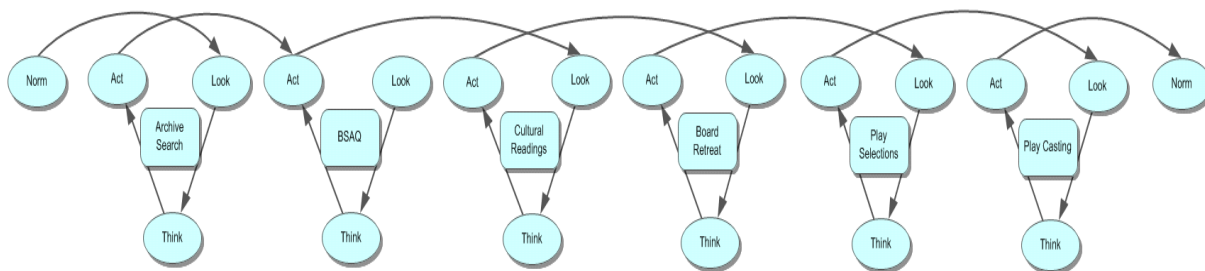
The group used the September 2012 meeting to formalize the agenda. Each member would present a 25 minute presentation for each topic. I would begin it with a recap of the project and allowed Adrianna to tell her story to the board. Devon would share our past attempts to provide inclusion and voice and let the board discuss ideas for future efforts. Stella would present research around current SPI policy that may inhibit growth or contribute to the problem of connecting with the community. Emily would discuss the current system SPI employed to reach and retain members and then let the board find new ways to do so. Finally, Ralph would ask the

board to brainstorm ideas for finding better ways to educate board members on roles and responsibilities.

**Adjourning.** Here is where SPI's intervention team differed from Anderson (2010). Instead of feeling a need to disband, the team wanted to continue in another form. As I told the team we were ending our involvement, Emily asked, "Does it have to be our last meeting?" Ralph suggested we ask the board to make this a standing committee to explore diversity and to keep the board aware of inclusion and voice. This interest in continuing the team excited me.

### Action Research Team Interventions

SPI conducted six interventions: an archive search, the BSAQ, the cultural readings, the board retreat, the play selection process, and the play casting process. These interventions occurred through the action research process and followed the Stringer (2007) action research intervention cycle. Figure 4.1 illustrates SPI's intervention cycle.



*Figure 4.1. SPI's Intervention Cycle*

Each intervention produced data and generated interest for the other interventions. The archive search showed the team the community's feelings toward the organization were valid. This led



the team to look at board effectiveness and the BSAQ. The BSAQ showed the need for educating the larger board and organization, hence the cultural readings and board retreat. The retreat discovered inclusive practices the board used for selecting plays and had directors looking through the lens of inclusion and voice when casting plays. The interventions began to create change in the board.

**Cultural Readings.** Another intervention the team chose to conduct was cultural readings. I initially headed up this project. First, I chose readings from three culturally different plays based on the community make-up of SPI's community. I decided upon sections from *A Raisin in the Sun* to represent the community's African-American culture, sections from *The House of Ramon Iglesias* to represent the community's Hispanic culture, and sections from *The Nerd* to represent the community's Caucasian culture. Once I chose multicultural selections, I set out to find multicultural readers. I first called Devon who eagerly agreed to read. I also asked Rosario Delva, a theater major with whom I directed previously. She agreed but could not attend the initial meeting. Likewise, Tim McFeely agreed to read but could not make the first meeting. Finally, I asked several other actors from SPI's production of *Chicago* to read and they agreed to make the first rehearsal.

Only Devon and I appeared on the day of the first rehearsal. After 30 minutes of waiting, Devon called several people he knew and they committed to read and attend the next rehearsal. I also added my daughter, who came with me that evening, to the list of readers. By the end of the allotted time, Devon fully staffed our cast. Afterwards, I gave him a ride home. On the way to his apartment, Devon asked me to help him. He lost his job because of his health and was behind on his rent. I told him I would try to have some money for him at the next rehearsal.

When we arrived at Devon's home, I witnessed several drug deals in the short time it took me to drop him off and leave. Devon made the comment, "I can't wait to get a job and leave this place."

The second rehearsal happened a few days later. We had the full cast, and everyone felt comfortable with their parts and the procedures. We realized the readings would help the SPI board and members see the community in a new light. After this rehearsal, I took both Devon and my daughter to eat at a local pizzeria own by Pete Speight, a member of SPI's board at the time. After we ordered, Devon quietly asked Pete for a job. Pete replied he had no vacancies but would keep him in mind. At the table, Devon talked about his life after his graduation from the Culinary Arts program. He worked for the local school system in the cafeteria but his managers were worried about his health and decided not to renew his contract. Devon's misfortunes set off a chain reaction leading to him becoming homeless. A friend from his church worked at the Housing Authority and found him the place where he currently lived. He was still unemployed, but his landlord worked with him on paying rent because Devon was one of his better tenants. I asked Devon to apply for a job as a Lab Assistant in the Culinary Arts program. Devon's eyes lit up at the possibility of working again. I gave him a ride home after dinner and some financial help for his rent. Devon said he would apply the next day.

Through my interactions with Devon, I began to change my views on people from "the other side of town." Devon's story showed me my conservative black-or-white way of thinking hindered me from understanding the real issues. He lost control of his life through no fault of his own yet did not want to fall into the situations of those who lived around him. He desperately

saw working as a way to get out of this situation. Later, Devon was able to find a job and leave his environment for a better home.

The readings were successful for many reasons. First, they involved many new members of the community. These members were able to interact with the organization. In doing so, SPI provided a new platform for the community. The readings also afford the organization a new experience by being exposed to new and diverse talent and cultures. Members were able to express their feelings and provide feedback to the board. Finally, and more importantly, the readings provided an informal and incidental learning experience for me. Through this intervention designed to help SPI better understand the community, I came to a better understanding of the community.

**The Board Retreat.** We held the board retreat on October 6, 2012. Eleven of the thirteen board members attended the retreat. The intervention team members – Devon, Emily, Stella, Ralph, and I – accounted for five of the group. The other attending board members included Jack Parsons, SPI's current Financial Secretary and longest serving board member at 40 years, Jess O'Reilly, SPI's Secretary, Ingrid Stephan-Douglas, Dianna Moore, Helen Parker, and Tim McFeely. We asked Adrianna to attend the retreat in order to tell the board the story we heard in August. We began the retreat at 10 a.m. and it lasted four hours with a twenty-minute break for lunch. I recorded and transcribed the dialogue from this meeting and generated 32 pages of notes. Again, all names here are pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity.

The intervention team chose to segment the retreat into 25 minute increments. Roy, Stella, and Emily suggested this time limit because it was how they taught at the university and proved to be effective. I would update the board on our progress and introduce Adrianna.

Devon would follow with a presentation on diversity and how SPI has many opportunities to incorporate inclusion. Emily would offer ideas for increasing and maintaining new members. Over lunch, Stella would refresh the board about existing policies and procedures contributing to SPI's problem. Finally, Ralph would instruct the board on the importance of developing better educated members. After the presentations, we would allow time for board members to generate ideas, express their feelings, and choose a few projects to help SPI facilitate this change.

**Study update.** I began the retreat by giving an update of the AR study. My archive search of previous minutes showed SPI's past efforts to communicate with the community and to become more inclusive. SPI was most recently concerned in July 2009 when board members began to hear comments from the community about not being inclusive and not allowing fair representation onstage or within the organization. The board chose to address the concerns with the committee, but the committee's efforts faded after two months. While the committee lost its momentum, two practices emerged. First, SPI decided to interview potential directors; specifically, with attention to communicating our new interest of inclusion. The second practice to emerge was opening the play selection process to the public. I noted that while this was an admirable effort, SPI still had the usual participants at these sessions. SPI was not really reaching new community members.

Next, I described the intervention team's efforts since SPI allowed me to conduct this AR study. An initial interview from October 2010 detailed SPI's wish to become a more inclusive organization. We also wanted to develop a new relationship with the community while maintaining existing relationships with the theater department at the local university and with a large international nonprofit organization headquartered in town. At the time, the board felt a

need to prepare for this international nonprofit's move to a major metropolitan area. This move would remove a majority of SPI's infrastructure. I gave the board the results of the BSAQ and showed them how we identified needs for strengthening the board's education, context, and strategic planning dimensions. I presented the archival data analysis, which found that SPI saw between 18% - 59% new participants on main stage productions annually from 1979 – 2012. I described SPI's past communication efforts. "We use contest, flyers, playbills, and websites among the ways we communicate with the community," I told the board. I then told them about the intervention team's feelings about the cultural readings. The team believed cultural readings would be a great way to open channels of communication with the community. The team recommended making cultural readings an annual event because they would allow the community to see our efforts and afford them a larger input into the season selection process.

Then, I introduced Adrianna. I told the board about meeting her at a rehearsal and how her story helped me understand the responsibility SPI encounters when it produces plays.

Adrianna described her experiences with SPI:

I started watching Southern Performers in 1991. My first show was *Brigadoon*. I absolutely love this play. But, I started to notice that there were always the same type of play and the same people. There was never any diversity, actually. I always wanted to be a member of SPI because I love theater. As the years went by, I just quit coming. Same people, same play. I just stopped coming. So I agree that SPI has to get out into the community more.

After Adrianna's presentation I showed the board a short internet movie called, "The Teddy Stallard Story". It told the story of a teacher unknowingly reaching out to a troubled

student. Her efforts changed the student's life. The student becomes a doctor and includes the teacher throughout every major life event. After the movie, I ended with a quote from Fred Rogers: "If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you are to the people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person" (Rogers, 2003, p. 160).

**Inclusion and voice.** Devon followed my presentation with a presentation about inclusion and voice. He detailed examples of how SPI is inclusive and supportive to the community. He noted SPI's teamwork involvement in productions and he cited his many experiences either directing or acting in plays SPI. SPI's leadership team helped him with every step of the process. He noted the June cultural readings SPI did as an instrumental step the board undertook to reach out to the community. He equated SPI's efforts with those of Western Michigan University's (WMU) Multicultural Theatre Program. Most notably, both SPI and WMU chose to present the play *Hairspray*, a play about cultures accepting each other. Devon ended his presentation with his thoughts on diversity in theater:

When I look at SPI, I say it does. And I can only speak for SPI. I think it does.

And I am so glad that you all have decided to increase diversity and incorporate it more and that you let this little lowly guy, who is an African-American, sit with you all and do what I do. And not label me and criticize me because of my color.

Thank you.

He based his assumptions on Gibson (2008) , who described a typical Community Theater organization's attempts to incorporate inclusion and voice. He offers solutions for helping an organization: non-traditional casting and partnering with minority theater

groups. Gibson stated, “The purpose of theater is to provide a ‘voice’ for an ethnic group so we can understand human behavior. For community theaters to include minority voices, they must be sincere, honest with themselves, and totally realistic with the hardships a minority production brings to them.” (p. 175). Devon agreed that SPI was branching out in that direction. The upcoming production of *Hairspray* and the possibility of *A Raisin in the Sun* began to resonate with him and his community.

**Increasing and retaining new members.** Emily used her background as a chemistry professor to equate SPI’s retention of members to Le Chatelier’s Principle. Le Chateleur’s Principle stated, “A change in one of the variables that describe a system at equilibrium produces a shift in the position of the equilibrium that counteracts the effect of this change” (Purdue, 2013). Noting the average of 20% new participants each year, Emily informed the group SPI should have more members. She explained,

If this was an equilibrium reaction, we should have thousands and thousands of people be members of SPI. But what happens is, we get new members for a season or two, and then they go back into the community. We don't see them again. We've seen that right? Somebody comes in, they involve themselves, and then we don't see them again. So what I want to do is shift the equilibrium. We have more and more of these members. But we don't lose them back to the community. They are not lost.

She then identified new ways to consider a new member by reminding the board that new members are not just actors. They also work behind the scenes building sets, sewing costumes, and donating props. New members come from new audiences, subscribers,

and board members. Emily's main emphasis was on keeping these new members in the system and publicizing this effort to attract more.

In order to keep track of new participants, Emily suggested a more intensive database of "every single person who is involved in a production or outside of production who interfaces with SPI. We should have a database that tells us who that person is, how we get in contact with that person, what that person did, what they might be interested in." Once SPI had this database, Emily suggested the use of social media and SPI's existing website to publicize the new people associated to the organization. She also suggested SPI update its website with more and current information as a way to increase interfacing with the community. Emily's final suggestion for the board was to attend auditions. She said,

Consider encouraging company members, who would be us, to attend auditions whether they intend to try out or not. To introduce SPI to new people. To just be there like family. I'm not going to audition, but I want you to come into our family. This play is important to me even though I'm not directing it or acting in it or anything. To show that this is a whole family coming together to put this production on

Her suggestion tied back into inclusion and voice, SPI's main desire of the community.

**Policies and procedures.** Stella provided the board with data she uncovered by searching SPI's policies and procedures from the website. One of the first issues she mentioned was SPI's definition of a member. SPI defines a member as "a person, firm,



or corporation who is shown by the records of the corporation to be the holder of one or more fully paid season tickets the current corporate year". Stella stated this definition helps create financial stability for the organization, but it excludes those who want to take ownership by volunteering. She stated, "My concern is we don't have a mechanism in place, to make volunteers feel more of a part of the organization." Basically, SPI's position is a member is one who supports the organization financially and excludes those who provide sweat equity. Jack surmised, "Members at this point are analogous to stockholders." Stella suggested the board redefine definition of a member in order to become more inclusive.

The next policy she discussed was the definition of a board member. While the bylaws set rules for minimum and maximum numbers of board members, they do not specifically state the qualifications for board membership. Currently, the bylaws allow for non-members to hold positions of Secretary and Treasurer. The others are selected by a nominating committee as assigned by the president of the organization. Stella mentioned the past practice of the president selecting members of the board for the selection committee. She added the president could select those from the general membership in order to be more inclusive.

Finally, Stella mentioned adding a diversity committee to oversee and maintain this effort to be more inclusive. While the current bylaws allowed the president to appoint an ad-hoc committee at anytime, amending them to make a permanent committee would show the community a commitment to become more inclusive. Stella added these committee members did not have to be board members. They could come from members

of the community; however SPI chose to set this committee, adding it to the bylaws would make a strong statement to the community.

**Board member education.** Ralph reviewed the results of the BSAQ with the board and illustrated the need to enhance strategic planning and education dimensions to become more effective. He offered a few observations as to why SPI scored low in these dimensions. He surmised SPI's high scores in the interpersonal dimension indicated a "social organization not as formal as those that receive government or local funding". While SPI does receive grants, it is not as accountable as a government organization would be.

Another suggestion Ralph offered was SPI's move from its own facility to the local government-owned theater. In the other building, SPI had more responsibilities and the board had a more active role in the organization. Since the move, SPI rents the theater for two weeks for each performance. The rent includes the theater's administration to operate and maintain the facility. "Hence, there was much more integration of board member duties. These days we have decreased those committees and I don't think we have as much integration and involvement due to the lack of committees," Ralph offered. He also identified SPI's high rate of board member turnover as a contributing factor to the lack of education. He said, "Lately we've been getting new board members because we've been having a lot of people leave for various reasons. These new people have been around the organization for an extended period of time and haven't got what we've done as an organization." Ralph stressed the importance of educating board members on their roles. He emphasized instilling pride in the organization, increasing

knowledge among board members, opening channels of communication with the community, increasing efficiency of the board, and increasing retention of board members.

Ralph then identified ways to increase board member education. He recommended attaching education mediums to the website so board members could access this information more easily. He also championed the idea of a board mentoring program whereby an existing board member would partner with a new board member to help her or him learn about roles and responsibilities. Finally, Ralph suggested creating a test for board members to help identify areas for future training. Emily suggested creating a manual for board members as a reference informing them of their responsibilities. Ingrid agreed and added, “Well speaking for myself, having been on the board for five or six years, sometimes you don't understand the rules of the game. You have to infer from what people do.” Many of the board members agreed.

**Final outcomes of the retreat.** All day, I wrote significant ideas from the board as the participants made them. At the end of Ralph’s presentation I recapped those ideas. The board chose to examine how it cast plays and find productions offering wider options for inclusive casting. SPI also wanted to educate existing board members on duties, goals, and objectives. To do this, it would create a board member mentoring program and develop a quiz for members. The board wanted to keep better track of those who participate through a database. Finally, SPI wanted to communicate with the community more to let the community know about its efforts. After setting these goals and assigning project managers, we adjourned the retreat.

**Play Selection.** As a result of the retreat, the board began to select plays through the lens of inclusion and voice. This practice turned into an intervention as it began to resonate with and expose the organization to a wider segment of the community. As a result of the discussion

during the retreat, the board chose to produce *A Raisin in the Sun*, which was the first time in the organization's history in which it produced a racially specific play. It also provided a majority of roles for African-Americans.

Devon volunteered to direct the production and cast many people not familiar to SPI. He began by explaining to the cast what this play meant for SPI and for the community. He toiled laboriously to make sure the play showed this importance. He had to balance the tensions of new members from the community with those of the organization. He succeeded marvelously. The community received the production and the board asked a cast member to fill a vacancy. *A Raisin in the Sun* shared the award for Best Production and several cast members shared acting accolades as well.

This intervention of producing a community-specific play was successful for many reasons. First, SPI opened up to a new segment of people unlike it had never done before. The production provided a new outlet for talent and exposed the organization to new participants. Second, the production exposed SPI's supporters and long-time subscribers to a new view point into the lives and concerns of a different segment of the community. Regulars were able to experience cultural insights on a larger scale. It also provided opportunities for different community members to participate with each other in the audience. Finally, the production showed SPI the importance of selecting plays through the lens of inclusion and voice. Board members were able to realize how productions such as *A Raisin in the Sun* provide opportunities to further the work done during this study.

**Play Casting.** After seeing the success of this study on the organization, I began to worry about losing momentum. I delayed my progress in this study to direct *On Golden Pond*, the story of

Caucasian elderly couple coping with change in the later stages of life. I was concerned a director not familiar with the study would not see the opportunities to carry on the focus of inclusion and voice. I volunteered to direct and the board accepted my vision. In the play, the couple's daughter brings home her fiancé and his son to meet them. I saw this scenario as an excellent opportunity to bring inclusion and voice into the production.

I cast Devon as the fiancé and a new actor, who participated with SPI's youth theater, Kevin McFee (pseudonym) to add a different dynamic to the play. I not only wanted to not only to bring new participants into the organization, but also I wanted to open the community to a different point of view. This production was also successful as many of the actors shared year-end accolades with those from other productions and some community members expressed their approval of my casting choices.

Although my participation in *On Golden Pond* interrupted my momentum as the key researcher in this study, I was glad I was able to keep the study's momentum going for the organization and was able to keep the focus of this study in the forefront of the organization as well as the community. It proved to continue through the rest of the season.

## **Conclusion**

While the intervention team started slowly, it gained momentum as members began to meet on a regular basis. The team was an excellent example of Tuckman's (1965) theory of group development (Anderson, 2010). The most trouble the team encountered was during the storming stage when two members, Devon and Ralph, encountered conflict. They chose to avoid the conflict in order to plan and execute interventions for the board. The most exciting facet of the group dynamic is the team wants to continue in some capacity, as a monitoring agent for SPI.

The first intervention planned was the cultural readings. It was successful for many reasons. First, it involved many new members of the community. These members were able to interact with the organization. In doing so, SPI provided a new platform for the community. The readings also afford the organization a new experience by being exposed to new and diverse talent and cultures. Members were able to express their feelings and provide feedback to the board. Finally, and more importantly, the readings provided an example of how an organization has opportunities to develop members and relationships outside the normal mission and operation. Devon and I were able to dialogue and I learned more about his life and background than in the two years I knew him as a student. Furthermore, Devon was able to use this new relationship to improve his life.

The second intervention, the board retreat, was more widespread. Board members got to hear the positive side-effects SPI provides participants as it produces plays. Members were also able to understand community theater's responsibility as it provides these life-changing experiences for participants. The retreat also informed the board of many different ways community theater provides inclusion and voice. Devon informed the board that efforts of

choosing the diverse plays of *Hairspray* and *A Raisin in the Sun* were beginning to resonate in the community and bringing a new awareness of SPI to the community. The board also heard about the need to strengthen existing infrastructure in order to keep track of those who interact, either in a major way or to a lesser extent, with the organization. The retreat also reacquainted members with organization policies exhibiting an exclusive nature and helped the board understand the need for education, especially among board members.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

This study explored ways in which a long-existing community theater organization in the southern region of the United States could increase inclusion and voice for its community within the organization. The three primary research questions guiding this study were:

1. What formal and incidental learning do action research team members experience around inclusion and voice?
2. What changes in the larger board's capacity to generate change in vision and overall decision-making relative to inclusion and voice are generated by the action research process?
3. How does and action research team's exploration of inclusion and voice impact the larger community in a community theater organization?

This chapter documents the findings from participant interviews and unsolicited feedback from Southern Performers, Inc.'s community members the team received during this study. I organized the findings to correspond with emerging themes and categories I observed during data analysis. Table 5.1 depicts these categories and themes.



Table 5.1

Research Findings

Research Question	Findings	Themes
What informal and incidental learning to action research team members experience around inclusion and voice?	SPI examined policies and practices	Everybody is in the show I still have a voice
	SPI realized inclusive practices	
What changes in the larger board's capacity to generate change in vision and overall decision-making relative to inclusion and voice are generated by the action research process?	The study forced SPI to examine the organization more closely	Holding Up the Mirror
	The board made significant changes during this study.	President Play Selections Diversity Committee
How does an action research team's exploration of inclusion and voice impact the larger community in a community theater organization?	The community reported positive effects of SPI's efforts toward inclusion and voice.	Encore!
	SPI learned it needed to continue efforts to help the community become more inclusive.	Working the Crowd

## **RQ 1: Incidental and Informal Learning around Inclusion and Voice**

### **Everybody is in the Show**

Participants in this study realized inclusive practices already available to SPI. During the board retreat, Dinah recalled her casting practice when she directed *Chicago*, one of SPI's vehicles for developing inclusion. She stated, "My practice has always been, 'everybody's in the show,' everybody who auditions. You may not always have the main part, or whatever, but you are in the show." During her critical incident interview, she recalled, "I opened [the show] up to just about anybody who wanted to be in it. It really helped me grow a lot." Dinah reported personal growth through this practice. She stated she gained knowledge and understanding from others.

Her experience with *Chicago* transferred into other directors incorporating her inclusive practices with their shows and the community began to notice. Devon revealed his surprise at the casting practices for *On Golden Pond*. "You've decided to take a traditionally all Caucasian cast and added color to it and it made me wonder if I could have done the same in some of my plays." Devon was not the only one to notice the SPI's new casting practices. During the intermission of *On Golden Pond*, Tim DeTrotta, a local playwright, asked about the choice to cast two roles with people of color. When the director responded he made the choice from the beginning of the process, DeTrotta replied, "Interesting! It adds a twist. It's good to see SPI making subtle statements." Dinah's inclusive practices set precedents for other directors which in turn began to build inclusion. As other directors continued to strengthen this practice, it began to affect the casting process and created a more inclusive environment. This inclusive influence on the organization began to seep into SPI's culture and had positive influence.

While SPI strengthened its inclusive culture on stage, Emily began to notice the efforts behind the scenes. She explained to the board at the retreat how SPI also needed to focus on those supporting productions:

What do our members look like? Could be a new actor. It could be a new technician like someone who designs lights or is a technical director or a set designer. It could be the people who build our sets. It could be new board members. It could be new subscribers to SPI. But there are other people that we do have, people who are involved with SPI behind the scenes. We want to keep them with us.

Emily implored the board to “look at all the people coming in. They have no experience. They are just like you. They came in and had a good time. It’s broadening our SPI members on the whole.” Emily found and importance in “keeping a relationship” with these people in order to build a more formal relationship. She was proud of SPI’s efforts to keep “really reaching out and try to keep people coming every chance we get.”

Devon described how SPI reached out to him. In his interview, he detailed his feelings with regard to inclusion. At first he felt as if the board was “testing me and focusing on the color of my skin. They were not looking at what I could bring with my talents to the theater.” He attributed this feeling to SPI not allowing him to direct the show he originally wanted to direct. However, as he progressed with the organization, he began to feel more accepted. He described SPI as a “family” because “everything I ever needed, whether it was props for another play at church, or rides to and from meetings, giving me a job when I didn’t have one, they became my other family. And I love them all.” He continued to tell how SPI helped him:

The love that I received, the support. Yet, letting me be the person that I am and use the talents that God has given me. Not just board members but other people affiliated with SPI. You feel genuine love. They approach you. They ask about you. They check on you. They support you in everything you do. Even a best friend with a tedious work schedule rearranges that schedule to support your creativity.

Even though he initially felt tested, Devon provides an example of how SPI's culture is inclusive. SPI cares and is inclusive and supportive of the community. It needs to find a way to usher the community members past the feeling of being tested for them to experience the inclusive culture.

**I Still Have a Voice** This study also helped participants find a voice. The best example of this is Adrianna, who described her experience of being in an SPI production after going through a divorce and losing her job:

I was me again. I felt that my feelings were back. My creativity was back. I didn't have to hang onto the stigma of divorce. I had something to look forward to and met such wonderful people. It gave me energy for the six weeks of practice. I got to come here and be a part of this wonderful organization. And I have FANS! I have fans! I'm happy again! This was the last seal of approval to get out of this slump!

Adrianna's excitement made an impression on several team and board members. Stella remarked:

I'm one who cries at watching a Hallmark commercial, but, to hear her describe her life before and her life after SPI (tears up)... It showed us how we affect the community members beyond providing them with outlets for talent, opportunities to experience theater. I think I probably look a little bit closer about that it means for someone to participate. It's not just about being on stage. It's about being a part of something. It brought a whole new perspective of what we do.

Many other members who heard Adrianna's story felt the same as Stella. In my personal notes I reflected, "Wow! This is a whole new aspect! I had no idea we had this responsibility!" I related my encounter with Adrianna at the next team meeting. Emily remarked, "That's a hell of a responsibility for us to have." Adrianna's newfound voice quickly educated team members and gave them a new perspective on SPI's outreach.

Another SPI member described his experience before and after becoming involved with SPI. Devon recalled how he felt about SPI nominating him for the board:

I've proven myself to these people. They must see something. They have to see something to ask me to sit on the board of directors. Even now after my experience these past three years, I know it's not something that we take lightly. I know some thought had to be put into it. The fact that my name came up was just...wow!"

This confidence helped him find his voice in the organization. In an interview I asked him about his behavior the first year on the board. I noticed he was quiet at board meetings and did not

offer much input. He said as he progressed and people on the board began to help him in other areas of his life, he began to feel more secure:

I learned that I could dream and do better things. Not just be this person sitting around the table being quiet and not talk and accept what life gives you. Take life. Deal with it. Learn from mistakes you made. Learn from experience and build on it to go on and be a better person. No matter what comes to you in life, absorb from it. In the past four years, even though I was quiet at first, I've learned to see myself as a sponge. I soak it all in from every person, every assignment, every play.

Devon's growth helped him find his voice, and he used it not only with SPI, but also in other areas of his life. He stated,

Being on this board has shown me, not just with SPI, but with every entity of my life, that I have a voice. While my voice may be different from somebody else's voice, I still have a voice. Everybody's voice should be heard. Now whether you decide to open up and use that voice, that's on you. But, to recognize the fact that you have a voice and it can be heard. It may not always be agreed with, but it can be heard. That was a key point for me.

As Devon progressed in SPI, he found people who accepted him and supported his endeavors in the organization. These same people also helped him with finding employment and better living conditions and the provided him with other support. Like Adrianna, Devon began to reclaim his

life through SPI. This process gave him confidence and this confidence strengthened his voice, a voice he used to help others.

As a result of involvement in this study and the organization, SPI participants report informal and incidental learning while fostering inclusion and voice. Dinah reports growth in understanding through her experience in directing *Chicago*. Devon reflects upon his own practices as a director while participating in *On Golden Pond*. Emily realizes the organization should reconsider how it defines participation and membership. Devon gained new confidence and was able to improve his life through participation. Likewise, Adrianna found confidence and her voice when she was included in the organization. Bringing these stories to the board's attention during the retreat created significant change. The board, inspired by these stories, elected to make decisions through the lens of inclusion and voice.

## **RQ 2: Board's Capacity to Generate Change**

SPI tried to change to be more inclusive than before. Jack Parson, an SPI board member for 40 years who recently retired from SPI, warned of an uphill battle for this study:

Our style has been “white bread” all along regardless of efforts. We’ve had members of the board with different ethnicities. We’ve early on cast without regard to ethnicity where possible. We’ve tried to reach out without, for the most part, singling out, you know? Including a wide spectrum without singling out one particular part of it. We’ve just never been able to generate much interest.

With Jack's experience in mind, this study was able to give SPI the chance to examine itself and make significant changes in order to become more inclusive and to give voice to the community.

**Holding Up the Mirror.** This study allowed SPI to examine itself more closely. In doing so, many board members were surprised at what they discovered. The BSAQ proved to be a great catalyst for self-examination. After seeing the data, Ralph and Emily commented on the results. The data took Ralph “aback [because of] the numbers involving education of board members. I was aware we really did not do good job of educating board members; however, seeing the numbers and how low they were really took me aback.” He offered an explanation for the low score, “I think we’ve evolved into a more compartmentalized process. It’s almost like we’ve assumed you’ve absorbed it by osmosis.” Emily concurred, “As one of the newer board members, I had to learn things for myself.” Devon agreed:

To sit there and not know what is expected as a board member? I refuse to let that happen again. It made me wonder if we were putting people in a position just to fill a position in order to say that we have a certain number or we’re meeting a certain criteria. Or, do we really want them for what they can offer? If so, we need to teach them what they need what they need to know to carry out their duties as a board member. Instead of putting people in vacancies to set them around the table month after month.

The BSAQ also helped members see the depth of the problem. Emily surprised by the varying degrees of responses to each of the questions, commented, “It got us all concerned and when you have the board thinking about those issues, that’s where the change would come from.”

Emily was not the only board member to notice the first signs of change in the organization. Dinah noticed the study’s influence on the board members’ participation. She remarked, “I think your study brought it more to our attention. Coupled with Jack retiring, I



think that's what is having an effect on board participation. This is the first I have seen board members, in a long time, taking active participation. People are doing stuff. There's an energy there better than it's ever been. And in talking with past board members, they see it, too."

Indeed, members began to participate more. Stella chose to investigate the verbiage in the SPI bylaws to see how the language limited the organization's membership. Her investigation uncovered SPI's strict definition, of a member being a season ticket holder, limits SPI's membership. She reported to the board, "One of the main problems with this definition is it's really easy to define who our members are and it helps maintain financial stability. We are receiving money from every single one of those members. The con is that we don't have any type of mechanism to include other members outside that economical pool." She asked the board during the retreat, "Do we need actually to define what a member is? We could change the bylaws to redefine membership to include SPI people who provide service or talent." During her interview, Emily underscored the importance of this type of self-examination, "It is very disconcerting to see us be very monochromatic."

Introducing the BSAQ started the self-examination and produced data the board used to continue further exploration. Board members identified a lack of education and limiting wording in the by-laws as two areas contributing to the problem of inclusion and voice. Once the board saw the data, they began to get more involved. This involvement is necessary to make significant change throughout the organization.

**Changes in the Board.** The board's self-examination initiated change throughout the organization. SPI elected its first African-American president in its history which sparked a new attitude toward selecting board members. The board also saw significance in selecting more

inclusive plays for each season. Finally, SPI saw a need to create a committee to keep the emphasis initiative of inclusion and voice throughout the organization.

**President.** The election of Devon Braxton as SPI president was the most significant change in SPI's history. For 50 years, SPI never had an African-American president. During his interview, Devon noted the historical context of this event, "Here we have an African-American president where you would normally see no African- Americans involved at all. It let me see we've come a long way." During the board retreat he expounded:

My friends and people I know ask me, "How do you feel about being the only Black person on the board?" I get asked this a lot. And even before all this came about, what was being said in our community, I consider [SPI] being diverse. I talk about this board a lot to my friends and my church members. I love you all. I've never seen it where it was you all were White and Black. I've never seen it like that. I've called you my family.

Other board members felt Devon's inclusiveness as well. Ralph discussed the significance of having an African-American president. His expectations for Devon's presidency were no different than those for past or future SPI presidents. He said in an interview, "If Devon is re-elected next year or someone else is, I would expect that person to be the face of SPI. They would need to go to organizations, churches of all types, schools and promote SPI." Ralph was proud of this historical achievement and held Devon to the same responsibilities the office held.

Devon's election and Ralph's expectations for him made an impact on other members as well. The board realized a need to mentor new board members and assigned each new member a

veteran on the board. Emily remarked about this practice, “I think it’s beginning to make a difference. Because now we have people coming into the board and we’re concerned about mentoring them now. That’s a difference.” Dinah also noticed a difference:

I think your study has kind of made us more aware. I have been thinking a lot about what everybody’s contributions to the board are. I noticed, being on the nominating committee, that we’re beginning to look at what gifts people have that fills needs on the board when we nominate someone. Where are the gaps? Let’s start filling the gaps with gifts that other people bring. I feel like we’re really doing a good job doing this with the members we just recently elected.

Nominating Devon to the board and electing him as president opened the door for board members to build on this success and reach out to other members of the community. This time, however, they looked at filling vacancies with people who were not necessarily friends or supporters of SPI. These people brought talents to enhance the board.

**Play selections.** This study emphasized inclusion and voice. This emphasis permeated through several areas of the organization. The play selection committee continuously tried to adopt the new climate through choosing plays for upcoming seasons. They selected *Chicago* and widely cast the parts with anyone who auditioned. They selected *Hairspray* which allowed for a highly diverse cast. SPI ventured into uncharted territory and selected *A Raisin in the Sun*. This production afforded SPI the opportunity to cast many new community members who had no previous connection with the organization. The play also opened SPI up to many new community members in the audience. Jack remarked, “We never had a suggestion of doing shows or having entertainment that specifically addressed the interests of a specific minority.”

The selection of these inclusive plays influenced directors in casting less inclusive shows. SPI purposely chose to cast two critical roles in *On Golden Pond* with people of color. This choice exemplified SPI's commitment to inclusion and voice. The commitment carried over into future selection committees. The current committee chose *To Kill a Mockingbird* to keep this new connection with the community. I was not present when the board voted on this selection. Devon relayed Dinah's statement after the vote, "Tell David our study was the reason I voted for it!"

**Diversity committee.** In order to keep to keep these changes in front of the organization, the board chose to create a diversity committee. Ralph wanted to keep the momentum going. He said, "It keeps board members thinking about it. A lot of it is just keeping this knowledge this study has brought to the table always at the forefront. Always remembered, never assumed." To accomplish this, the intervention team wanted to stay together to become an SPI committee for inclusion and voice. According to Stella, the plan is to "morph into an actual diversity committee and become a standing committee for SPI." This sentiment shows SPI may be looking to break the cycle Jack described. As he later said, "The idea of inclusivity has come up before the board many times. And there have been a lot of efforts put forth to try to be more inclusive. None of which had any success for more than a short period of time. Hopefully, this will have more long-term success.

This study forced the organization to examine itself more closely and to make significant changes. The archive search, BSAQ, and action research team found areas within the organization which were limiting potential. The team, through its insistence to remain as a steering committee, showed a significant change in the strategic context uncovered by the

BSAQ. When the board saw the survey's results at the board meeting, members saw a need to participate more and become for active. Through this activity, SPI learned how it limits membership and sought ways to address these limitations. The board made significant changes by electing its first African-American president and by selecting plays providing more opportunities for inclusion and voice. The actions taken by SPI during this study created positive change for the organization.

### **RQ 3: Impact on the Community**

SPI's commitment to change had an impact on the community. Members of the community reported seeing positive change in the organization. They also reported learning about others' lives through theater. However, not every report was positive. SPI experienced an event signaling it has more work to do with the general membership if it truly wishes to realize the organization to fully embrace inclusion and voice.

**Encore!** After SPI's production of *Hairspray*, a member of the community submitted a letter to the editor of the local newspaper. In it the author recognized how the "choice of HAIRSPRAY by the Southern Performers speaks to an effort to bring diversity to the theater and to the community." She detailed her observations about the audience being "as diverse as the actors onstage. As a former [civic theater] usher, I can say the audience of HAIRSPRAY was the most diverse that I have ever seen. The diverse nature of this group made the show a shining success." She did not just notice SPI efforts toward inclusion and voice. She saw SPI providing an opportunity for the audience to "see, meet, and get to know people from diverse backgrounds – they learn – becoming less fearful and more trusting. Integration into a larger world becomes

much easier.” She continued, “Through the arts, we get a glimpse of what it is like to be in the shoes of another.”

This community member was not the only one to report improved understanding through the arts. During the reading selections at an SPI awards banquet, one audience member stated, “We seem to be able to accept difference in others when we are watching their world on stage. Now if only we can learn to be so accepting on the stage of life.” These comments showed SPI it was not only succeeding in this study, but it was also having a transforming effect on community members. As the letter writer summed up her experience of that evening, “It is my hope that performing arts in our local community can help lead the way to understand how diversity is better than segregation.”

**Working the Crowd** While the general community gave SPI rave reviews for its efforts, one event showed SPI it has a large task within its general membership if it truly is to succeed. During the 2013 annual shareholder meeting, Devon, as SPI president, introduced me to provide the general membership with an update on SPI’s study. I concluded my report with announcing the election of SPI’s first African-American president. I paused for applause but the room was completely and uncomfortably silent. After a few moments I quickly moved on to the next part of the meeting and sat down. I asked Devon about this event during his interview. He noticed it as well:

I was surprised there was no applause for the accomplishment and the progress we made. It honestly felt like some wanted to applaud but because no one initiated it, they didn’t. I did see smiles. I saw smiles from my fellow board

members. So even in the silence, in the crickets chirping, I felt the board had my back. I mean they had to have my back to have elected me.

Ralph noticed the stillness, too. He explained it thusly:

I think there was a bunch of white guilt. By applauding, they would be acknowledging we haven't had an African-American president in the organization and I think that may have been a bit of white guilt. I think they are ashamed of it. The fact that we haven't had an African-American president until now. But, I don't think they are negative toward Devon. I think it's actually a bit of white guilt and shame. To me it felt like we have the board in line with this issue, but we need to have another intervention to help bring our subscribers around.

This event, the stillness of the general membership, speaks volumes to the work still in front of the board. Board members will need to work at changing the mindset of the whole organization if it wishes to completely be more inclusive to the community and help it find its voice.

While the community responded positively to step SPI was making to become more inclusive and to give the community a stronger voice, it also showed SPI a need to continue its efforts. The glowing review for its productions coupled with the positive feedback from those attending the cultural readings were indications SPI was effectively communicating its emphasis on becoming more inclusive and giving the community a voice. Similarly, the negative feedback from the community during the awards banquet indicated while SPI made progress at the board level, it needs to find ways to communicate its message to the larger organization.

## **Conclusion**

This study uncovered hidden aspects of the organization it either did not realize or forgot. SPI saw a need to shift the focus of who is participating to include all who support productions. First Dinah told of her casting practice of including any who audition. This practice opens SPI to more of the community. Once they are in and experiencing the organization, Emily offered a new way of thinking about participants. She wanted SPI to build new relationships with everyone involved with a production: actors, stage hands, suppliers, etc. SPI reenergized its practice of casting without regard to race or color by specifically casting minorities in two pivotal roles of a traditionally all-Caucasian play. These are examples of SPI's efforts to focus on inclusion.

More importantly, SPI learned what can happen for those who participate. SPI provided opportunities for participants to build confidence and voice. One participant used her voice to help reaffirm herself after a major personal shift. Another used his voice to reach out for help. He not only received help, but also used his new confidence to expand his horizons within the organization across other areas of his life. As he grew, he helped others find their voice and use it as did he. SPI uncovered a hidden responsibility it has to its membership: the responsibility of helping others find their voice.

SPI reported several positive changes to its organizational structure with regard to inclusion and voice. First, members reported the BSAQ as an extremely important tool for self-examination. Seeing the results sparked dialogue among the team and board surrounding defining members. The dialogue allowed SPI see this definition broaden into considering more



participants throughout the organization. This self-examination proved instrumental in creating organizational change.

Perhaps the most visible and important change SPI made was electing its first African-American president. This decision facilitated dialogue not only within the community, but also within the organization. Committees began to make decisions through the lens of inclusion and voice. The board began to examine board member nomination practices and started looking for ways to include members not normally associated with the organization. Committees also started to select plays providing the organization with more opportunities for inclusion. This practice inspired directors to cast shows through the lens of inclusivity. To keep the momentum going, SPI's intervention team chose to become a committee to keep viewing the organization's decision-making process through the lens of inclusion and voice. This study provided the catalyst to make significant positive change.

While the community noticed SPI's efforts in incorporating more inclusion and voice from other members of the community, the general membership showed the organization has a larger task before it if it wishes to truly become more inclusive. The community reports favorable reviews of SPI providing opportunities for members to learn about each other and to use this education to help salve differences. The general membership may be suffering from white guilt and will need SPI help to overcome it. This suffering could be an avenue for further research. By participating in this initial action research study, SPI now has the skills and tools to help its membership.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS

#### **Summary of Findings**

SPI began to emphasize an inclusive culture throughout the organization. It examined how it defined membership in the organization and how that definition limited membership. SPI also discovered it can be more inclusive in casting to provide the community with more opportunities to develop its voice. This new culture permeated the organization and had the board making decisions through the lens of inclusivity. The community responded favorably to most of these changes, but showed the organization a strong need to continue and to fortify its efforts.

**Team.** Team members reported several instances of working through the Marsick and Watkins's (2001) informal learning cycle throughout this study. Within the context of membership, Stella initiated her own research (Seufert & Meier, 2013) and learned SPI had an exclusive definition of membership. Emily used her professional background to help her understand how SPI had more opportunities to interact with members (Doornbos, et al., 2008). Both of these learning sessions occurred when the team began to consider membership and interaction with the community.

Another learning cycle occurred when Roy reviewed the data from the BSAQ. He saw a need to champion a mentoring program for board members. Peer mentoring is a form of incidental and informal learning (Bolt, 2008; Doornbos, et al., 2008; Ellinger & Cseh, 2007).

Through his experience with SPI, Roy believed the organization needed a mentoring program. After the survey, he felt his intuitions were valid enough to proceed with his cause.

One of the most powerful team learning moments was introducing Devon's and Adrianna's experiences with SPI into the study. Witnessing their stories brought a new context the team did not consider – the unspoken responsibility SPI has to help the community find its voice. Their experience with SPI was so powerful many team members reported carrying this influence with them in other personal and professional areas.

**Board.** For the first time in the board's history, it used a scientific tool to evaluate board effectiveness (Brown, 2000; Jackson & Holland, 1998). The board used this tool to focus its efforts toward becoming a more inclusive organization. These changes in effectiveness began to change the internal culture (Pahl, 2006) positively and the board began to make decisions through the lens of inclusion and voice. Unlike most self-evaluations, SPI used the BSAQ as a proactive measure which allowed them time to understand the results fully and use them more efficiently (Lichtsteiner & Lutz, 2012).

The board chose to keep the intervention team. However, the team would become a standing committee with the charge of keeping inclusion and voice at the forefront of the decision-making process (Herman & Renz, 2000). SPI also chose to change recruitment strategies (Brown, 2000). It reconsidered policies and procedures to become more inclusive. One of the most significant evolving practices was in casting shows. SPI now tries to choose plays allowing for more inclusivity and opens casting of other show to wider possibilities. These changes indicate a positive change in SPI's culture.

Devon's appointment to president represents SPI's largest visible commitment to inclusiveness and voice. SPI began to leverage the diversity he brought to the organization by involving him on the intervention team (Davidson, 2011). Furthermore his influence proved integral to many interventions. Through Devon, SPI discovered a need to look past diversity and see other needs and responsibilities the organization meets for the community. SPI added this experience to the board's culture and now makes decisions through the lens of inclusivity.

**Community.** The community began to see the result of SPI's new culture. The selection of plays afforded community members many more opportunities to participate. Play selection also made a difference in educating the community. The plays resonated and showed the community SPI's commitment to inclusion and voice. Likewise, the community applauded the more inclusive casting practices. Trying to find ways to inject inclusion, either through finding a role for everyone or through nontraditional casting, made a difference with the audience. The success from this change is now the catalyst for future season selections.

## **Study Conclusions**

**Conclusion 1. The action research process supported informal and incidental learning around inclusion and voice.**

Mezirow (2008) defined transformative learning as "the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindset, habits of mind, meaning perspective) – sets of assumption and expectation – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change" (pp. 25-26). We view this type of learning through frames of reference the "structures of culture and language" (p. 26) we use to make meaning. We shape

our frames of reference through habits of mind which we channel into our own points of view.

Mezirow stated transformative learning follows several steps:

1) a disorienting dilemma; 2) self examination with fear, anger, guilt or shame; 3) a critical assessment of assumptions; 4) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared; 5) exploration of options for new roles, relationships and action; 6) planning a course of action; 7) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; 8) provisional trying of new roles, 9) building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and 10) a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (p. 28).

SPI experienced several incidents of transformative learning during this study. First, Adrianna described her transformation through SPI's audition. Her story of finding SPI after her divorce and rebuilding her life through the audition process and rehearsals exhibit the steps Mezirow said are necessary for transformative learning. Adrianna experienced fear and shame. She had to overcome her mindset of thinking SPI was exclusive in auditioning. While talking to her sister, she shared her discontent and explored her options. She auditioned, earned a part, and began rehearsal. Her performance helped her reclaim her confidence and reintegrated into life with a new perspective. In this way, Adrianna found transformation, and SPI learned of a peripheral responsibility it had to help transform perspectives of its members.

Devon was another example of how SPI helped transform its members' lives. His disorienting dilemma was being homeless and its accompanying fear, guilt, and shame. Through his participation with SPI, he shared his situation with others, albeit reluctantly. With other

members, Devon was able to explore his options and plan his future. He was able to find a job and with this job find a home that would improve his living conditions immensely. Through his participation as an actor, director, board member, and president of SPI, he gained confidence and developed his voice. He used this voice in other areas of his life and continued to improve. His participation on the intervention team also helped him grow and gain confidence. Devon was able to transform his perspective through this study.

## **Conclusion 2. Action research process demands strong leadership and provides conditions for change.**

Davidson (2012) said that leveraging diversity requires strong leadership. This study showed leadership occurred at many levels throughout the action research process. The action research process strengthened my leadership skills. For the first six months of this study, I experienced a lack of participation by the team members. I had to regroup and recommit the organization in order to conduct the study. One of the ways I did this was delegating tasks among team members. Seufert and Meier (2013) advocated for leadership to become less pronounced. By delegating tasks, I empowered members to become leaders for several interventions. Team members planned and conducted training during the board retreat.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) described three pitfalls for researchers leading action research: pre-understanding, role duality, and having access to the organization. This study found leadership occurring in two of these areas, pre-understanding and role duality. First, I, as the researcher, used the team to check my understanding of the issues, the data, and the feedback we received during this study. Furthermore, I found myself fluctuating often between researcher and board member. To facilitate this I used the first-, second-, and third-person techniques

Coghlan et al (2010) suggest. The process showed me the benefits of stepping back from the process so I could better serve the organization.

Finally, an organization needs to have strong leadership to have long-term success with inclusion (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013; Davidson, 2011; Sabharwal, 2014). Furthermore, long-term success with inclusions helps the organization become more effective (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013; Richard, et al., 2007; Sabharwal, 2014). This study used the intervention team to develop leadership for the organization. Members of the team used data from the research to train the board at the retreat. The leadership of the team members began to change SPI's culture and made it more inclusive. The team saw this change and chose to remain to increase the chances of long-term success. Bernstein and Bilimoria (2013) and Sabharwal (2014) predicted SPI will see a long-term increase of organizational effectiveness as it develops a more inclusive climate.

### **Implications**

**For SPI.** The silence of general membership silence at the awards banquet showed a need for a further study with SPI. The board created an inclusive climate and is now making decisions with inclusion and voice in mind; however, the board now needs to find a way to extend this culture to the general members and financial sponsors. The intervention team could use AR to help those members not on the board understand the need for acceptance. Here, the effect of the Southern culture would be a large obstacle for the team to consider. SPI made great strides toward helping the board become more inclusive. It appears it now needs to do the same for the general membership.

**For Other Community Organizations.** This study showed how AR can work with one community nonprofit organization. Because many community organizations are nonprofit, researchers could help those organizations become more effective. AR affords organization the catalyst for change as it involves members of the organization in the research process. The process also introduces scientific data and tools into the organization that provide more concrete information on which to base decisions. Also, because of its democratic process, members are more likely to make positive changes with longer lasting effects.

**For Adult Education Theory and Research.** This study drew on informal and incidental learning. It would be interesting to document connections between informal and incidental learning and transformational learning because this study showed a significant connection between members of the organization learning informally from others and having that learning make a large impact in their lives. Several participants in this study reported transforming their understanding of SPI, other members, other participants, and themselves throughout their involvement. Research on how incidental and informal learning in an organization transforms members' beliefs and understandings and how they use this transformation to better themselves and others would be an important avenue to explore. It could help us find more meaningful ways to increase organizational effectiveness while providing participants a way to improve their lives and the lives of others.

Ellinger and Cseh (2007) found six catalysts for facilitating informal and incidental learning. Learning needs to seek expertise, be challenging, be of a high priority, be accessible to delegation, have a need to help others, and have feedback (pp. 441-443). The findings of this study follow these catalysts. By using action research, SPI introduced expertise into the



organization for the first time. Action research also forced the organization to keep learning as a high priority by introducing an intervention team to maintain this focus. The democratic process of action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) naturally delegates the learning process. The main purpose of this study shows the desire of SPI to help the community. Finally, the community provided feedback.

Doornbos, Simons, and Dennessen (2008) stated that learning occurs from colleagues, individually, from outsiders, from new colleagues, together, and from experts. This study reported learning occurred in all of these areas. Action research brought members together to analyze data. It found outsiders brought new perspectives about how SPI affects the community. These outsiders had a large impact on the board. Finally, members learned individually as well. Stella and Emily both learned about SPI's policies and procedures and how they contribute to SPI's culture.

The study supported the need for self-assessments as a learning tool. The team took Lichtsteiner and Lutz's (2012) advice about using assessment early instead of as a means of mollifying the community. Assessing gave them time to really understand the data and make better informed decisions. The board also used this assessment to make a more organizationally effective culture. Pahl (2006) said these self-assessments are excellent methods to address board and organizational efficiency. This positive change in board efficiency translated into a new culture. The board transformed its culture in to one that became more inclusive and learned about other aspects of its interaction with the community.

## **Conclusion**

This study's findings show SPI deeply ensconced in the Marsick and Watkins's (2001) learning cycle. Once the team saw the data, team members began to research other areas and learned about how SPI's policies and practices affected membership. The team also discovered a need to educate the board. More importantly, the organization learned how it helped participants transform.

This study is the first time in SPI's history it used scientific research to address an issue. Through this study, SPI realized significant change in the board's culture. It now makes decisions, selects new seasons' plays, and examines casting practices through the lens of inclusion and voice. The community reported positive feedback on these efforts. SPI's study also uncovered how it helps participants transform. Members identified how they were able to find a new voice and gain new perspectives through participating in the organization. Their experiences follow Mezirow's (2008) template for perspective transformation.

SPI's study leaves implications for further research. First, SPI discovered a need for action research to help the external membership with changing its culture around inclusion and voice. Secondly, this study implies success in using action research to facilitate change in other community organizations. Finally, there is an interest in informal and incidental learning and how it relates to transformative learning.

## EPILOGUE

On January 5, 2015, Devon Braxton unexpectedly died while at work. He was alone in the Culinary Arts office that morning and apparently suffered a seizure and could not be revived. His death came as a shock to the school, to SPI, and to me personally. He was 36 years old and a major reason for this study's success. Devon was instrumental in using his influence in the community to help SPI become more inclusive. Through this study, Devon began to find his voice. One of the last conversations he and I had about this study centered on his voice. I mentioned, as I was looking over the data, I noticed it looked as if Devon had found his voice. He thought about it and remarked, "Yes, I did! And I'm using it in other places, too."

At his funeral, his mother asked SPI to speak about him. We elected Dinah to speak. She told the 500 people in the church about Devon's influence in SPI, how he came to us as an actor, developed into a director, and used his gifts as a board member. The audience applauded when Dinah announced his direction of *Driving Miss Daisy* and *A Raisin in the Sun* and how those productions helped SPI reach out into the community. She read Devon's last email to the board he sent the day before his death. He talked about how proud he was of all the board members for working hard and creating a great atmosphere for the holiday dinner SPI served the membership on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. He ended his email by saying, "I love all of you and I am proud of my SPI family." Dinah ended her tribute telling the audience, "Devon, we love you, too, and we will miss you more than we can show. We already feel your absence and will have a hard time continuing without you."

I would like to acknowledge Devon's passion for this study. As president, he placed it as SPI's main goal. As an intervention team member, he was the engine for change. As a member

of the community, he provided valuable insight and understanding for this study. As my friend, he exposed me to a new experience different from mine. He thought of me as a mentor; however, he taught me about how to persevere and keep dreaming. He also opened my mind to another culture and challenged me to reevaluate my beliefs. In the few months since his death, I have found myself wanting to share the good events and things we learned through working together. For example, the local theater in which SPI stages its performances, chose to light the marquee for 24 hours after Devon's funeral. The marquee read, "Rest in peace, Devon." He would have been humbled by that gesture.

Thank you, Devon, for your belief in this study. You helped me more than I can ever show.

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## Appendix A

### Critical Incident Interview Questions

## **SPI Study Interview Guide**

(Greetings and thanks for participation)

This study is to help SPI give its community voice and a feeling of inclusion throughout the organization. This interview is designed to provide me with your personal insight and experiences you gained by participating in this study. As has always been the standard procedure for SPI's study, I will maintain confidentiality of your contributions by assigning a pseudonym or by keeping your comments anonymous at your request. Do you have any questions about the consent for you signed? Do agree to allow me to record this session?

Please tell me about yourself. How do you define who you are to others?

### **Background**

I am trying to learn about how SPI's study into inclusion and voice affected participants. Mainly, I hope to discover individual experiences of informal and incidental learning. Informal learning is learning from participating in individual or group activities. An example of informal learning may be learning a foreign language by immersing yourself in that particular culture. The group would be teaching you the language. Incidental learning is unplanned learning gained from participating in an activity. An example incidental learning may be a personal reflection of your beliefs after interacting in an activity with others. It was not the intended outcome, but the incident was meaningful enough to teach. So as we talk, today, I would like to have you think about times during the last three years when you experienced informal learning, learning new material and skills while participating in the study, and when you experienced incidental learning, learning about others or having your personal understandings challenged.

Let's begin.

**Prompt:** Think about a time during your involvement with SPI's study where you felt good about the organization's efforts. What about that experience made you feel good about it?

### **Probes:**

- What made this experience different from your usual participation with SPI?
- What about this experience surprised you?
- Can you describe the emotions you felt?
- What did you learn from this experience?

**Prompt:** Think about a time when you experienced difficulty with this study. What did you find most difficult in your participation?

**Probes:**

- What emotions did you experience and how did you handle those emotions?
- What made this experience different from your usual participation with SPI?
- What about this difficulty surprised you?
- What did you learn from this experience?

**Prompt:** What were some key turning points for SPI during this study?

**Probe:**

- Who did this experience happen to?
- What situation led up to this turning point?
- What exactly happened?
- What did this turning point accomplish for SPI?

**Prompt:** What were some key turning points for you during this study?

**Probe:**

- Who all were involved in this experience?
- What situation led up to this turning point?
- What exactly happened?
- What did this turning point accomplish for you?

**Prompt:** What surprised you most about this study? What surprised you the least about this study?

**Probe:**

- How did you handle this surprise?

- What adjustment did it cause you to make?
- What thoughts and feelings do you have about it?

**Prompt:** How successful has this study been for SPI?

**Probe:**

- How has it affected the community? The organization? You?

**Prompt:** How significant has this study been for SPI? For you?

**Prompt:** Please tell me about any other information you feel we did not cover today you think is important to this study.

Thank you for agreeing to participate. Please feel free to contact me if you have further thoughts or questions. Also, I may need to contact you again to follow up on this interview.

This ends the current interview.