

## Summer '71 – Global Research Assembly – Chicago “One More Recollection”

The Chicago Global Research Assembly of Summer '71 focused on the analytical tool called the social process triangles – defining, describing, going down 5 or so levels, writing, rewriting, in small groups. We must have taken down a forest that summer with all the paper, copying and recopying and re-writing we did. This was our first major foray into figuring out what we called the “New Social Vehicle” was all about. Step one, as I indicated, was to describe the way the social process functions dynamically as it is now; future groups would work on outlining what it would look like in the future. It sorta seemed logical and you could believe someone had a grand plan for how this was all going to work out.

But, it was hard work; very confusing, even to the leaders. It was exacerbated by the fact that we were in three locations: the home-base seminary campus, the Fifth City program center, and the “South House” on Blue Island. The Institute had no rooms large enough to hold plenaries in, so we used Malcolm X City College to rendezvous on Sunday mornings. It was a logistical nightmare. The coordinating team met in Room E on the first floor of the campus, which is how the term “Room E Dynamic” was coined. They spent all day coming up with the procedures for the next day and then sent one of them to each of the three large sub-groups to share with the resident leadership what to do the next morning.

I was one such resident leader for the group that resided, met and worked in the South House and Gary Tomlinson was our designated emissary from Room E. As I recall we had responsibility for the “cultural pole” with the economic and political going to the other two residential groups. Gary, a mild-mannered chemical scientist by training, was very patient with us as we asked each day a torrent of questions trying to understand what the procedures for that day meant (Illustration: “In groups of three or four, brainstorm a list of examples for each triangle at level 4, and then group them by similar sociological type and give each a provocative title. 15 minutes. Next swirl the data around so that the ‘aha’ moment happens and you grasp the penny drop revealing a profound insight. Take your time but you only have 10 minutes for this step. Then write up your break-throughs with a four-sentence paragraph, each sentence ending with an “-ing” verb. 20 mins.”).

I recall one of our leaders breaking into tears; and I guarantee you that sentiment was shared by others less courageous to show their feelings. About midway through the summer it dawned on me (and no doubt some of the others) that the Room E folks didn't have a clue as to what we/they were trying to do. So we just went along for the ride hoping that somehow it would all come out in the end. It was a frustrating, hellacious, humiliating, difficult four weeks in circumstances that rendered the task all the harder. (References to the South House being a fire trap have been well-documented, so I won't belabor the point.) I can't believe no one bailed out. I know some must have been on the cusp.

We finally finished – well, at least the four weeks were complete – and it came time to wrap things up with a reflective conversation – a debrief. Each resident group did their own and I was tasked with leading the one for the South House group. The procedures read, “Do a reflective conversation.” Well, thank goodness, I knew what that meant – lead an O-R-I-D conversation. Since my assignment was given last minute (wasn't everything that summer last minute), I had to “wing it” and I really wasn't fully prepared. I was exhausted and just wanted to get this thing over with. And I'm pretty sure my feeling was shared with a lot of others.

I don't remember the exact wording of my first question, but it went something along the lines of "What struck you about the summer research assembly?" I guess I thought I would get back some benign remarks like, "it was fun," "it was interesting," etc. and then I'd be prepared to ask a follow-up like, "What (the hell) was fun about it?"

Audrey Ayres, a colleague from Naperville, a western suburb of Chicago, was very devoted to our mission. She was one of the Institute's most loyal and faithful volunteers, driving in from Naperville, four (sometimes) five days a week, including the 1 ½ hour trek up to Uptown after we moved there. She did that for 30 plus years and never missed a beat. She and her husband Joe (and their family) regularly hosted our Memorial Day picnic on their expansive grounds where we played softball and cooked hot dogs every year. She also served on the board for a number of years.

Audrey – you could always count on Audrey – raised her hand and said - with a little more forcefulness in her voice than usual - something like, "Well, I can tell you what struck me." The group all turned their heads and peered at her; Audrey usually wasn't that strong; she was the more the "quiet type". And then she proceeded to share – this is not exact but the nearly 50 year remembrance of what in effect she said:

***"What struck me is that this was just about the hardest thing I've ever been a part of, except for childbirth. I have no idea if what I, or anyone one of us, wrote this summer will make any sense to anyone else who will ever read what we wrote. But, I can tell you for a fact that what happened to me this summer was that I became the New Social Vehicle and feel as if I am prepared to take on whatever needs to happen next because it sure can't be any harder than what we just went through."***

After a moment of stunned silence, the group broke out in cheers, laughter and plenty of "Amen, Sister". Fortunately, since I didn't have a long list of questions anyway, I concluded the conversation (no one noticed that I didn't do the other three levels), we had the Send Out and all returned home to be the New Social Vehicle. Just like that.

A year later, when we all met again, a thousand of us, in the newly donated Kemper Building, we had "turned to the world," and morphed into the Institute of Cultural Affairs. We identified the whistle and pressure points to transform society. And we decorated the four walls of the Great Hall with aluminum foil and had a Ball. Thank you Audrey!

Jim Troxel, Chicago, April 2020