Journal of Systemic Therapies, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2010, pp. 27–46

DOING SYSTEMIC TRAINING SYSTEMICALLY: EVALUATING, RESPONDING, AND EXPANDING

JANNE GRAFF
InPraxis, Denmark
DORTE LUND-JACOBSEN
Malmö, Sweden
W. BARNETT PEARCE
Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, USA

Systemic training involves a tension between purpose (to promote trainees' creative adaptability in specific situations) and responsibilities (to instruct, evaluate, and credential trainees who demonstrated acceptable levels of learning). In this paper, we describe some ways in which we have thought about and developed specific ways of dealing constructively with this tension while working in a multi-year systemic training program whose participants are practitioners from multiple sectors of society. Our contribution to this literature includes integrating concepts drawn from communication theory, adult development, and transformational learning. In the course of this project, we moved from seeing the systemic trainer as caught in a dilemma to a more productive conceptualization of a decision-tree including the experience of the trainees; situational features of time, context, and sequence; and specific patterns of conversation between trainers and trainees. In our work, we invite learning by inviting trainees to make three movements in the development of their own competence; our side of this process includes evaluating, responding and expanding. We describe the experience of our work with three students as examples of these movements and the ways they create possibilities for using constructively the paradox between our purpose and roles.

In the end, good teaching lies in willingness to care for what happens in our students, ourselves, and the space between us. Good teaching is a certain kind of stance, I think—a stance of both receptivity and presence.

But receptive presence is hard, active work. We are not simply nodding and smiling, holding and comforting. We do demand. As educators, we do have a responsibility to maintain standards and hold high expectations for our students . . .

Address correspondence to Dorte Lund-Jacobsen Dorte@Lund-Jacobsen.net. The experiences referred to in this paper occurred when the first two authors were teachers at DISPUK, Snekkersten, Denmark.

G3939Text.indd 27 8/4/2010 10:48:24 AM

> *... For more than any other factor, it is the partnership of teacher and student that finally determines the value of an education. In the nurture of that partnership lies the mentor's art (Daloz, 1999, pp. 246–247).*

> *... our experience has led us to be wary of the general applicability of ideas. Rather we have to look at the specific details of contexts and the stories of any group and design our training to fit with these ... Central to this is to accept that as teachers and trainers we will thus constantly be involved in things which are not always consistent with each other. No matter, fit requires a different aesthetic" (Bayon, Samper, & Villar, 1992, p. 274).*

There is a well-known paradoxical relationship between the content and the methods of systemic training. We find ourselves, on one hand, instructing trainees about the concepts of systemic practice and evaluating them as they learn to perform the relevant techniques. On the other hand, the content of what we are teaching denies the possibility of orthodoxy, stakes out a strong claim for the context-dependence of any action, and puts a premium on spontaneity and novelty. The grammar of training and the grammar of systemic practice seem incompatible. Is it possible to train people to perform systemically? And if so, how can we conduct this training systemically?

PARADOXES IN DOING SYSTEMIC TRAINING SYSTEMICALLY

We are sometimes confused and conflicted about how to act as trainers, and we take comfort in those times by the good company we keep. Burnham (1993, p. 375) concisely captured the confusion by saying "Spontaneity takes a lot of practice." We laughed in solidarity with Radovanovic's (1993, p. 252) paradoxical claim "it is systemic not to be systemic sometimes." In a series of focus groups conducted by Pearce, Villar, and McAdam (1992), systemic practitioners were asked about the frequently heard comment that other practitioners are "not sufficiently systemic." Their discussion made the paradox explicit: One characteristic of systemic practice is that any specific act can be systemic (they did not mean that "anything goes," but that in the right context, there is nothing that can't be appropriate for a systemic practitioner to do) *and* that those who act systemically are readily distinguished from non-systemic colleagues by what they choose to do in specific situations (Pearce, Villar, and McAdam, 1992, p. 82). Cecchin (1993, p. 253) mused about "a strange loop ... which I do not understand" going on between him and those he trained. As he put it,

> when I thought I had found some good ideas ... I had a 'high' feeling. At such a moment the students would experience confusion and have a 'low' feeling. ... The same would happen when the student appeared contented with an idea or became comfortable with some sense of 'reality' or 'truth.' In those moments I would often begin to question myself as a teacher about the usefulness of what I was doing. (pp. 253–254)

As the context for this discussion, we remember that (1) paradoxes are quite common, not limited to systemic practice and (2) paradoxes are not necessarily

G3939Text.indd 28 8/4/2010 10:48:24 AM

problems; to the contrary, they can be the source of delight and illumination as well as creating space for constructive deviance. So the question is not "How can we eliminate paradox," but rather "How we can live within this paradox delightfully and with a sense of enlightenment rather than be paralyzed by it." How can we avoid the "linguistic tyranny" (Pearce, 1994, pp. 90–93) of participating in corrective and evaluative feedback that only reproduces existing forms of systemic practice and at the same time remain in a teacher-student relationship where certain ideas have preference to others? Like the participants in Pearce, Villar and McAdam's (1992) study, we think that it is important to make distinctions between systemic and non-systemic ways of acting. But how can we do that without "freezing" the evolution of systemic practice and turning out orthodox copies of our own ways of working—clones who would rightly be regarded as not sufficiently systemic because they are trying too hard to act like systemic practitioners?

We found it useful to begin our exploration of these questions by modeling the paradox as a dilemma as shown in Figure 1. Expressed in this formal model, the dilemma looks inescapable and paralyzing: systemic trainers are required to do two things (uphold standards and promote creativity). However, if each of these is done successfully, they lead to mutually exclusive outcomes: trainees who follow the rules and trainees who break the rules. Feeling the force of this dilemma, some trainers have emphasized one side of the trainer's dual responsibility, but felt keenly the absence of the "other" outcome. For example, Korman and Moen (1990) eloquently described the "prison" created for trainees when the trainer (in this instance, a learning team) overemphasized the "follow the rules" (in this case, asking circular questions) side of the dilemma.

Culture of systemic practitioners:
Shared story that working systemically means adapting creatively to specific situations in a manner recognized by other systemic professionals as consistent with an underlying grammar* of action and epistemology

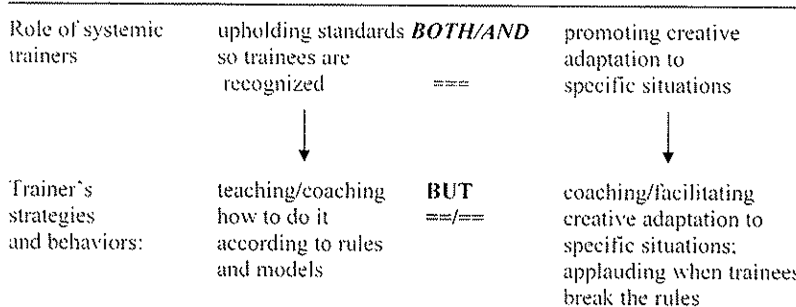


Figure 1: A model of the dilemma of doing systemic training systemically

G3939Text.indd 29 8/4/2010 10:48:24 AM

> The therapist . . . frequently sat and struggled with an internal monologue of questions about which she was curious, but hardly dared to ask because they were so obviously linear. One could almost guess that the team would react to such questions with scathing criticism and accuse the therapist of not being circular or systemic, and every therapist had a self-censure which prevented such type of questioning and of eliciting "useless data."

We have experienced the opposite problem. When we have stressed the "creative adaptation" side of the dilemma, we encounter problems in evaluating trainees—and in defending those evaluations when challenged, whether by the trainee him or herself or by a supervisor or external accrediting agency.

THREE UNTOLD STORIES IN THE DILEMMA OF DOING SYSTEMIC TRAINING SYSTEMICALLY

The clarity of the model in Figure 1 enables us to identify the untold stories in it. These include (1) the experience of the trainees; (2) time, context and sequence; and (3) the specific patterns of conversation between the trainers and trainees. By bringing these untold stories into the conversation, we achieve a richer understanding of how we might do systemic training systemically.

The Experience of the Trainees

In one sense, systemic training is like all other training designed to enable adult learners develop proficiency in a complex form of performance, and we want to bring in some voices from that literature. What do we know about the way adults learn?

We know that there are different ways of knowing. Based on studies of college-aged young adults, Baxter Magolda (1992; 2001) described them as occurring in a sequence of four stages:

- *Absolute knowing*: knowledge is viewed as certain; the learner is heavily dependent on external authorities as the source of this knowledge
- *Transitional knowing*: knowledge is viewed as increasingly uncertain, and learning moves beyond knowledge acquisition to knowledge application
- *Independent knowing*: knowledge is viewed as having a high level of uncertainty and the learner respects the fact that different people have different beliefs that might be equally valid
- *Contextual knowing*: knowledge is viewed as being very uncertain and contextually bound; the learner expects him/herself and others to present knowledge as legitimate within a given set of assumptions and situations.

Perry's (1999) also used the idea of sequential phases, naming them:

- *Dualistic thinking*: sorting concepts into simple, black and white dichotomies and assuming that knowledge means acquiring more information
- *Multiplistic thinking*: exploring alternative points of view based on confronting inconsistencies or the realization that authorities can't provide adequate answers to the questions they are posing
- *Relativistic thinking*: reflecting on the evidence and logic on which they and others base their ideas; making and living by strong commitments. In this level, the learner has "discovered how to think further, how to think relatively and contingently, and how to think about thinking. For here it is up to him in what crucial spirit he is to employ this discovery (p. 42)." The options include becoming a "cynical gamesman," creating barriers so that this newfound ability does not raise questions about his or her life and commitments, or forming new commitments based on reflective thinking (pp. 41–42).

Systemic trainers usually work with adults whom we might suppose to have reached one of the more sophisticated stages or phases of development. More directly relevant, then, are studies of learning by adults. O'Sullivan (2002; see also O'Sullivan, Morrell, & O'Conner, 2002) noted that many adults who take training experience "a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world." In this "transformational learning," Mizirow (2000) say, adults "transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (pp. 7–8)." When "frames of reference" are called into question by a "disorienting dilemma," learners engage in:

Reflection: reassessing the justifications for one's beliefs and the efficacy of the strategies and procedures that guide one's actions

Critical reflection: calling into question the validity of the presuppositions on which one makes meaning

Critical self-reflection: reassessing the way one has posed the problems one confronts and way one's frame of reference has been formed.

Barner's (2002) review of this literatured concluded that six types of experiences "develop and refine the postgraduate student's cognitive abilities" (p. 107):

- Exposure to ill-structured and complex problems
- Use of reflection and articulation
- Opportunities for collaborative learning
- Involvement in cognitive apprenticeships
- Creation of learning partnerships
- Participation in the learning community (pp. 108–133)

The most successful learners, Barner (2002) notes, are not passive recipients of these six experiences. Rather, they "actively seek out such experiences and take responsibility for co-constructing each of these experiences in a manner which serves to support their overall learning needs (p. 134)."

Radovanovic's (1993, p. 250) reflections on her experience in a systemic training program is fully consistent with these studies of transformational learning. She developed a provocative model of six "stages" of learning moving toward what she called "positive delinquency" as a systemic practitioner:

- Great expectations: What are the rules?
- Chaos, disorder: There are no rules!
- Either/or position: There can be no rules!
- Both/and second order: What do I mean by rules?
- Self reflexivity: Which rules fit for me?
- Positive delinquency: Challenging rules.

Dissolving the Dilemma: Time, Context, and Sequence

One of the conclusions we draw from the review of adult learning in the previous section is that something of time, context, and sequence must be introduced into the dilemma outlined in Figure 1. Learning is not the same at all points in the process; in fact, there seem to be discontinuous movements from one form of learning to another.

A second conclusion is that these stages are not discrete. One idea is to assume that trainee's performance is context-dependent.

> An emerging assumption is that individuals do not function "in a stage." Rather, individuals tend to exhibit a range of responses across stages. How an individual performs at a given point in time—that is, what particular stage characteristics he or she is evidencing—will depend on a variety of factors; how well the person was feeling or concentrating at the time, whether the person was distracted by another concern, the difficulty of the task presented, and the type of feedback and support offered. (King, 1992, p. 000).

Systemic practitioners have responded to these insights in two ways: clarifying contexts and focusing on particular moments.

Lang, Little and Cronen (1990) clarified contexts by distinguishing among three "domains" production, learning, and aesthetics and Burnham (1992) did the same by differentiating "approach," "method," and "technique." Burnham reminded his readers that the AMT model was intended "to be useful rather than representing a fixed reality" (p. 22). Exemplifying what he meant by this caveat, he wrote two conclusions (A and B) to this article, advising readers who prefer clarity to read conclusion A, those who are interested in further mystery to read conclusion B,

G3939Text.indd 32 8/4/2010 10:48:27 AM

and those "who are organized by neutrality to read both and/or neither" (p. 23). In a subsequent section, we follow these good examples of contextual clarification; differentiating among the contexts of evaluating, responding, and expanding.

But how stable are these contexts? Bayon, Samper, and Villar (1992) noted that contexts are always subject to being changed by what happens within them: "Setting the context at the beginning of an activity is no guarantee that anything will work for any longer than the moment in which this context setting takes place. The process of 'emergence' is often so fast and so powerful than an acceptance of this as part of what we manage in learning is enormously freeing" (p. 274).

Focusing on Patterns of Conversation

Our way forward is informed by all of these ideas, but particularly by our understanding of Bayon, Samper, and Villar's (1992) work. Whatever else training might be, it is constituted in interactions between trainers and trainees.

This orientation resonates with Anderson and Swim's (1992a) description of their as "creating a space and a process for dialogue—one in which the learner's expertise and the teacher's expertise are combined to create newness and greater competence for both" (p. 153). This insight, along with the exchange between Fruggeri (1992) and Anderson and Swim (1992b), focuses attention on the systemic trainer's expertise in constructing conversations that enable and facilitate the trainees' learning.

As we reflect on our experience, we find it useful to name these abilities and outcomes.

- *Openings*: in the to- and fro- of conversation, there are specific moments when the action of the trainer can have disproportionate effects on the learning experience of the trainee. For example, a productive learning experience may be called into being if the trainer asks a question in a specific way at just the right time, invites the trainee to reflect on their own experience, shows a videotape of another systemic practitioner, invites the trainee to join a team of systemic practitioners, or refuses to answer a question for which the trainee desperately wants an answer.
- *Rhetorical sensitivity*: the ability to perceive what the trainee is asking for and to perceive openings for responses that facilitate transformative learning (Hart & Burks, 1972).
- *Systemic eloquence*: the ability to judge what is needed in the interaction at that moment (Oliver, 1996, p. 250). For example, if we accept Kegan's (1998) notion that learning is best in situations with an optimal ratio of support and challenge, systemic eloquence consists of an ability to decide whether more support or more challenge would best serve the needs of the student and the objective of the training program.

Using these concepts, it is possible to extend the dilemma in Figure 1 to show the "outcomes" of the trainer's behavior. At a surface level, Figure 2 simply adds a third row ("Outcomes") to the two already in Figure 1 ("Role . . ." and "Trainers' strategies . . ."). The more important difference, however, lies in looking at how systemic trainers should and do act in moments of conversations with trainees (displaying rhetorical sensitivity and themselves modeling the situational adaptability that they are teaching) and in explicating the deep grammar of systemic practice (which is consistent with situational adaptability). Given the analysis in Figure 2, the dilemma in Figure 1 stems from a false dichotomy between two aspects of the trainers' roles; teaching "according to the rules and models" is systemic when it is situationally appropriate and responds to the invitations of the conversations with trainees or the needs of evaluation and/or credentialing activities.

Both Figures 1 and 2 are from the perspective of the trainer and helpfully clarify the as-yet-untold story about the interaction between trainer and trainee. We want to focus on the to- and fro-ing that occurs in training, when trainees "ask" for certain things from the trainers fully as much as trainers "ask" or "require" things from the trainees. The fact that the trainers often have a written syllabus or plan of study only makes their side of this interaction more visible; it is not less "real" than that created by the trainees. To continue this discussion, it is useful to introduce some additional concepts:

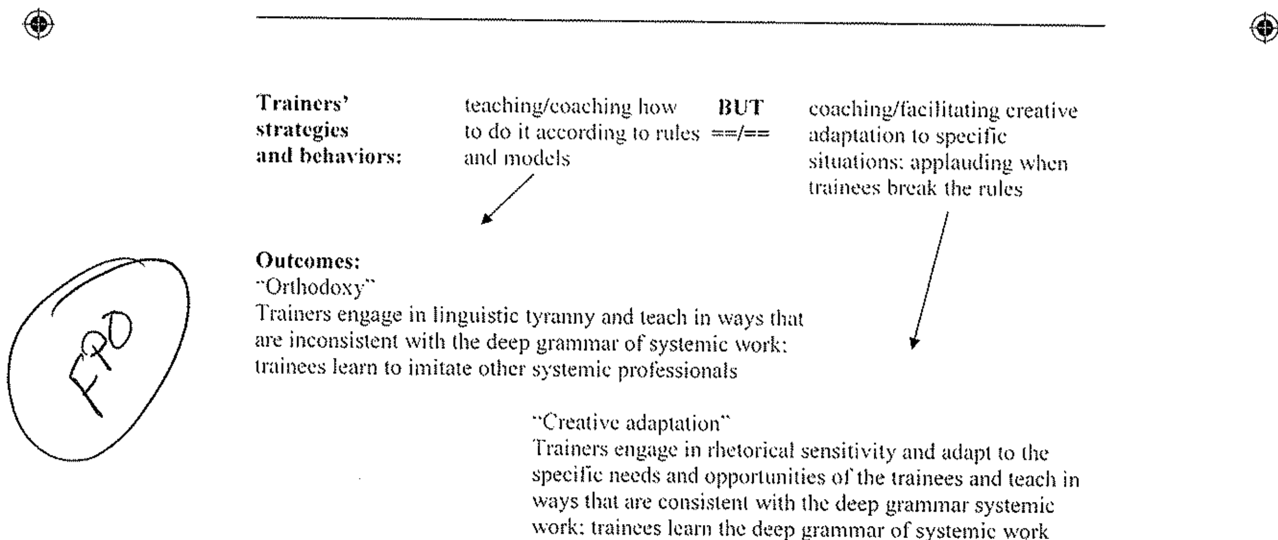


Figure 2: Escaping the dilemma by concentrating on creative adaptation in order to bring about learning of the deep grammar of systemic work

G3939Text.indd 34 8/4/2010 10:48:27 AM

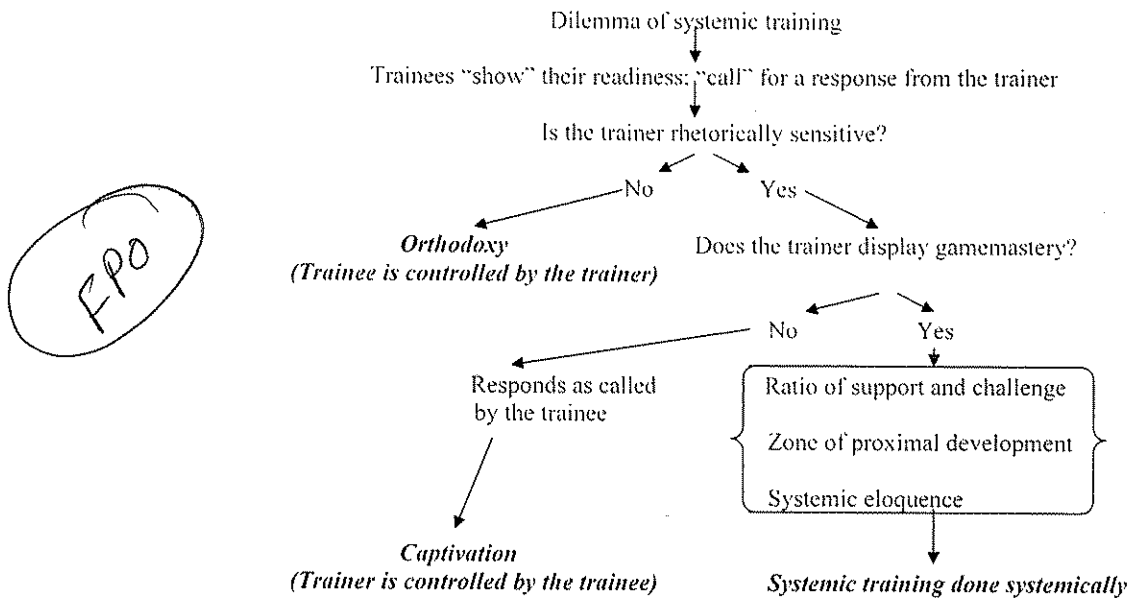
- *Language games*: game-like patterns of interaction in which the meaning of an act derives largely from its place in the state-of-play, and in which participants feel a sense of oughtness to act in certain ways in order to continue playing the game (this concept was developed by Wittgenstein, 1958);
- *Gameplaying*: the ability/performance of acting in such a way that the game continues (Pearce, 1994, pp. 84–86);
- *Gamemastery*: the ability/performance of acting in such a way that one changes the game, or achieves the purpose of the game by acting outside the rules of what is expected or legitimate (Pearce, 1994, pp. 84–86);
- *Zone of proximal development*: borrowed from Vygotsky (1978), this term directs attention to those things that the trainee can do with support but cannot do without it;
- *Ratio of support and challenge*: borrowed from Kegan (1998), this term directs attention to the things that the teacher/trainer provides the trainee. According to Kegan, learning is inhibited if this ratio is too far skewed in either direction; and,
- *Linguistic tyranny*: an outcome in which one person accepts the invitation of the other to respond only within the frame of reference of the other (Pearce, 1994, pp. 90–93). In the context of training, two forms of linguistic tyranny are usefully discerned:

  Orthodoxy: the trainer controls the trainee through instruction, evaluation, information control, or the sheer force of the trainer's greater experience.
  Captivation: the trainee controls the trainer. If the trainer accepts the invitations from the trainees to meet their needs and act as the expert, the trainee structures the learning experience.

Figure 3 shows a "decision-tree" model of how trainers and trainees interact and three possible outcomes. The desired outcome, of course, is that systemic training is done systemically; the undesired outcomes are either of the two forms of linguistic tyranny described above.

Begin at the top of Figure 3. The first two lines describe the situation in which, we believe, all systemic trainers find themselves. The trainers must cope with the tension between two sides of their roles (teaching/evaluation vs. modeling/coaching situational adaptation) and with the responses by the trainees to whatever they do. It is good systemic practice to interpret the trainees' behavior as "showing" their readiness (or lack of readiness) and "calling" for an appropriate response to from the trainer.

At this point, the first of two important bifurcation points is reached. If the trainer is not sufficiently rhetorically sensitive to understand what the trainees are showing and calling for—for example, the trainer is too tied to the syllabus or captivated by the "teaching/evaluating" side of the role—then the trainer will act in ways that, if successful, will lead to "orthodoxy." The markers of orthodoxy include trainees who are very good in contexts similar to the ones in which they have been instructed, but not good in extrapolating to novel situations, and whose



work shows little variation or personal flair. On the other hand, if the trainer is sufficiently rhetorically sensitive, she or he will respond to the trainees appropriately, and come to the second bifurcation point.

The ability of the trainer to display gamemastery determines whether she or he responds as called for by the trainee, or does something appropriately deviant. The problem with responding to what the trainee calls for is that, by definition, they are at a lower level of learning about systemic practice than the trainer, and will ask for what seems appropriate at their level of development. If the trainer responds to that call, it will cement the trainee at the level of development; in Figure 3, we call that "captivation" of the trainer. The alternative is to respond to the call in such a way that it changes the game being played and simultaneously challenges and supports the trainee to a higher level of competence. Whether they use these terms or not, we believe that successful trainers carefully balance the ratio of challenge and support, judge the ever-changing zones of proximal development of their trainees, and model systemic eloquence (Oliver, 1999).

MOVEMENTS AND MARKERS OF LEARNING IN THE THIRD YEAR OF A SYSTEMIC TRAINING PROGRAM

The experiences reported here come from a three-year course offered by the Danish company DISPUK. At that time, DISPUK was a leading provider of training,

consultation, and therapy grounded in systemic and social constructionist literatures and practices (it has subsequently shifted to a narrative approach). The participants in the courses were professionals, primarily in social and healthcare systems. The purpose of the curriculum is to connect what we teach to the students' personal and professional experience and the contexts in which they work. We invite them to reflect on their experience and apply what they are learning to their work. In the first two years of the program, we focus on systemic and social constructionist ideas in practice according to the rules and standards in the field. In the third year, students are encouraged to develop their own style, form and preferences within a systemic epistemology.

Students in their third year of training frequently ask for feedback about whether they are acting appropriately systemically. We interpret this as an invitation for us as trainers to mark them as members of the community of systemic practitioners. Instead of setting ourselves up as the ultimate judges, we have built a program that supports three movements by the students, each of which leads to a marker of themselves as systemic practitioners. The first movement focuses on distinguishing systemic practice from those "outside" the community; the second and third focus on the students' own story of themselves as a practitioner and on their relationship with their fellow students. As will become obvious, we do not see these as three sequential steps; rather they are three distinguishable opportunities for constructive engagement with the trainees.

Evaluating

We require the students to write an academic paper suitable for publication. In the paper, the students are directed to explain the conceptual basis of systemic work, to compare different forms of systemic practice, and to interweave theory and practice in a way that leads to a self-reflective awareness of their own behavior. We evaluate this paper on the strictest of academic standards.

Preparing a paper for publication can be seen as honoring an old tradition, and academic standards do not always fit with systemic ideas. The technology of writing lends itself to using statements as if they were claims about truth and knowledge. We are struck by how little discussion there has been about the tension between the standards of academic work and systemic ideas.

We've chosen this unusual component of systemic training in part because the challenge of writing helps students discover whether they can maintain a systemic perspective in an inhospitable medium and can be recognized, both by fellow trainees and by those outside the systemic community, as systemic practitioners. This complex, contradictory setting is a fertile site for transformative learning. In addition, this task challenges our rhetorical sensitivity and gamemastery as trainers when we respond to questions like these:

Are we allowed to use this word or expression here?

I have now learned that transference doesn't exist. So what do you call it here?

How do we honor those questions without stifling their curiosity? In their writing, students often make "mistakes" (e.g., using a diagnostic term or linear hypothesis) and sometimes act as if they have committed a verbal crime, saying, "I'm sorry!" How do we respond in a way that both maintains standards and mentors them toward independent competence as practitioners?

We find it useful to think of our trainees as becoming members of a new culture, and this as a two-step process that we might call boundary-crossing and then reverse boundary-crossing. The distinction between horizons and boundaries provides one way of thinking about this movement. Both demark the limits of what a person can see, but a horizon is not visible as a limit. It just defines the *umvelt* within which we live. A boundary, on the other hand, is visible as a limit; it is perceived as confining the perceiver inside and differentiating that from what is outside (see Pearce, 1994, chapter 7). In order to cross a boundary, it is first necessary to see it as a boundary rather than a horizon; to see that there is something on the other side and to learn enough about it to be able to distinguish what is on "this" side and what on "that" side of the boundary. During this process, we expect students to inquire about comparisons of what they already know and what they are learning, and to have some insecurity about whether they are acting in a manner consistent with the new culture that they are learning.

In the first two years of the training program, trainees confront the task of learning that what they thought they knew within horizons was in fact within boundaries. The language and the rules of the game of systemic practice seems initially strange because they see it through the lenses of their own taken-for-granted perspectives. We often hear questions about whether this (systemic) concept is equivalent to this (other paradigm) concept as trainees sort through the differences between what they know and what they are learning. They often try to comprehend systemic culture using the language and concepts of their previous experience and training, and when they try too hard to act systemically, they sometimes get paralyzed, as Korman and Moan (1990) and Byron, Samper, and Villar (1993) reported. The tendency of systemic trainers to resist setting up rules and standards, which is appropriate for experienced practitioners, may structure a ratio of too much challenge and not enough support for trainees who are negotiating boundary-crossing. Groups that we have trained have often been frustrated and sometimes have revolted if we do not pay sufficient attention to their need to mark these boundaries, which sometimes takes the form of being told what to do and what not to do.

Trainees who succeed in boundary crossing begin to feel more comfortable acting systemically. They no longer have to be so mindful about how they are asking questions or constructing conversations and can rely on their newly-formed systemic intuition. Systemic ways of working become their new taken-for-granted perspective and they become able to engage in irreverence (Cecchin, 1992) and productive delinquency (Radovanovic, 1993).

One consequence of internalizing the rules of the systemic community is that the boundary between it and other ways of working may disappear, becoming a horizon

again. By treating the final papers as a strict academic task, we invite students to engage in reverse boundary-crossing, showing us (as teachers) and the rest of the systemic community that they have become sufficiently enculturated that they can negotiate a task in which the standards of academia are the highest context. We treat this paper as an examination which students must pass, and it functions as a ritual marking the full admission of the student into the systemic community.

Responding

Students receive direct supervision frequently during their three years of training. However, in the third year we have an additional activity in which they bring in a videotape from their own working context or bring some of their own clients. Our intention is to create space for new practices to develop, knowing that the different contexts in which students work call for different abilities. The videotape or live work with their own clients gives students an opportunity to show how they have used systemic ideas in their specific contexts and gives them a chance to have responses to what they are doing that do not include evaluative language.

This activity is very useful for us as teachers because it takes us out of our own comfort zone and increases the polyphony of voices in the training situation. We see this exercise as a structured way of resisting what we call "orthodoxy" in Figures 2 and 3, and creating a curiosity about worldviews and contexts rather than a competition to see who has the truth. As trainers, our focus is on how students adapt systemic practices to the specific contexts in which they work, and in so doing, we co-create with the students new experiences that are not just trivial recitations of our teachings.

When looking at the students' videotapes, we follow a set of guidelines:

1. What data do we as audience need to know?
2. How does the student want to use the group?
3. How will he or she use us as teachers during the process?
4. What are the student's own ideas about this particular work?
5. What is the goal for the student's activity as a whole, and in what way can we participate? What kind of observing, feedback and responding will be most helpful?
6. What does the student want us as teachers to look at?
7. What will be most helpful for the group to look at?
8. What is the goal for the student that this form of responding can emphasize?

We divide the group into two teams with different tasks.

Team 1. This team is invited to observe and reflect about the content and process of the work shown to us. The idea is to create many stories, making it possible to open up new perspectives in connection with this kind of work, including perspectives that the student hasn't recognized yet. This assignment functions as an

opportunity for the team to spot openings and to highlight for their fellow student where he or she is onto something new and exciting and what is special about their form of practice. We invite the team to show rhetorical sensitivity toward the student presenting the case. They have to balance between recognizing and connecting to systemic ideas (acting like a native of the culture shared with the presenter) while remaining curious about (acting like a non-native) and inquiring about the culture and values of the work and the context that is being presented.

Team 2. This team is invited to observe and reflect about the student's own goal and wish for feedback and response. Questions that can guide their reflections include:

Why did the student do what he did? What was the effect of what he did?
What was co-created during the work? What stories were developed? Why did the student think that just this story was a good one to follow?
Which invitations were taken up; which were not taken up; and how can we understand this pattern of responses to invitations?
What shifts can be seen between the student's and the client's positions during this process?

After everyone has watched the videotape or live consultation, the two teams reflect in turns. When this has been finished, the teachers interview the student with the purpose of co-constructing a story about the student as a *special* and *specific* systemic practitioner. We hope to help create a professional story that can guide the student's future practice and work as a member of the systemic community. To start this conversation, we ask questions something like this:

1. What have you heard that was of most interest for you?
2. What is it that you appreciate most about your own kind of work?
3. What do you want to work on further after this conversation?
4. If you had to name your own "rough sides" as a practitioner, what would you say?
5. Do you have any questions for us as teachers? What kind of feedback do you want from us?

After the session, the group is asked to connect what they found interesting in this case to their own field of practice. The general question is: What is their learning and how will they take this into their own practice?

The final part of this process asks the student to summarize his or her own learning. We focus on the most challenging parts of the responses from the teams and from the teachers, and ask the student to take the discussion in to some theoretic themes that are relevant to future work in systemic practice. In this way, the student is invited to begin expanding the ideas of the systemic community into his or her own context of practice.

G3939Text.indd 40 8/4/2010 10:48:34 AM

Expanding

When the training program is over, students will have to continue working in contexts that are often not supportive of systemic work without the support of the training community. Many students find it difficult to maintain systemic thinking and practice within their workplace culture. Some experience resistance from their colleagues who feel disqualified by efforts to implement systemic practice, and some feel isolated and think about finding new jobs. In some ways, their dilemma resembles that which we experience as trainers: *how can they engage in systemic practice in their workplace without performing linguistic tyranny to their colleagues who do not have a systemic orientation?*

In some extreme cases, former students have attempted to remain "in" the training context by "hanging around" the institutes, attending new workshops, and otherwise seeking the comforts of like-minded fellow practitioners. We do not see this as the most healthful response, and we specifically *do not* invite students to become systemic missionaries. Rather, we emphasize what we earlier called "reverse boundary-crossing" in which they develop a sensitivity to what can and cannot be done in specific contexts. To facilitate this reverse boundary-crossing, we use an exercise that we call "Personal Professional Future House," inspired by Peter Lang.

1. The teachers conduct an interview with each student about the future.

Imagine that the date is exactly one year after you have completed the three-year training program. In this year, you have succeeded in developing exactly the competences that you wanted and are now very well known as a professional in systemic practice in your field. We, who know you very well, meet you today, and we express our surprise that so much has happened in such a short time. So, tell us what it is that we are seeing and hearing about you. What does it look like around you? What does your heart burn for? What are your thoughts occupied by? Who are you working with? What do you do? What is it that you have developed and done? What has made you so well known? What are you especially proud of? Who, in your personal history, would have foreseen that you have brought your life and work in exactly this direction? What would they have seen or noticed already in this year since you finished your training? What were the first steps you took along the road? Which ideas have you been forced to give up along the way? What were the biggest hurdles? Who inspired you and helped you along the way? What have been the reactions of others about the steps you have taken? Who contributed and in what way? What circumstances contributed to make this possible?

2. The group is invited to pose questions to the person being interviewed.

The student being interviewed is placed in an observer's position in which he or she listens without responding. The teachers ask the group to generate questions. When a substantial list has been made, the teachers interviews the focus person about which questions caught his or her attention.

3. The teachers conduct an interview about the present.

Now you are back in the present moment. What has become clearer to you about what is important for you as you set personal professional goals for the coming year? What are you especially pleased that you have discovered? Who else should be involved in your development, and how should this be done?

4. The teachers interview the group about their ideas about their own *future.*

As we complete this process, we invite the students to think about goals that lie beyond completion of the training itself. The reverse boundary-crossing that we think is important involves having a new goal that is specific to the social settings in which they will work and live after completing training.

LEARNINGS: THREE STORIES

These activities produce a number of openings for constructive engagement with the students. These openings are challenges to the trainers. Are we sufficiently sensitive so that we detect them? If we detect them, are we sufficiently skilled as gamesmasters that we can respond appropriately? We have found that these moments are not only openings for our trainees to become fully-fledged systemic practitioners, but are also openings for us to learn how to do systemic training systemically. Here are three stories.

Peter*

Peter's development took a major step after the second task, when he brought a videotape of his conversation with a pupil in a school for children with learning disabilities, where he works. The group's feedback and response opened up new perspectives for Peter in his work with the children, particularly in terms of their possibilities of returning to normal schools. Based on this feedback, he began bringing children who have succeeded in this transition to talk with others who have not. In our terms, "responding" led to "expanding" and this was so successful that he opened up for "evaluating" which he had previously resisted. It was as if knowing that we were all recognizing his competencies in the specific contexts of his work was the key event for him in his learning process.

Helle

The process of giving feedback and response to Helle's videotape particularly challenged us as teachers. Her tape was of a conversation with a mentally disordered young woman who lived in the institution where Helle works as an occupational therapist. The conversation was about how the young woman should spend the

*For purposes of privacy, all names and indentifying characteristics have been changed.

?/identifying meant?

weekends, and the conversation included her parents and an interpreter, since the family does not speak Danish.

During and after the "responding" session, Helle again and again tried to make us aware of her wish for a more strict and proper "evaluation" of her systemic practice. We as teachers were unable to hear this because we thought that the process we were guiding was "responding" and not "evaluating." Helle, however, had another idea. She was thinking of the process as if it were an assessment and evaluation and she wanted feedback on her abilities to follow systemic rules in her work. Like others, she insisted on getting an answer to her question, "am I acting systemically enough?"

When we (finally) recognized this and gave her the evaluative feedback she was demanding, she was able to continue her learning process and be "irreverent" (Cecchin, Lane, & Ray, 1992) to "proper" systemic practices. She has now developed a new kind of conversation with the clients and their parents that, although not regarded by them as "therapy," helps the family and her client to communicate better and to get on with their lives in a better way.

In this instance, "evaluating" was a necessary precursor for "responding," and led to "expanding." Her initiatives have spread to other professionals in her field to whom she has demonstrated this kind of conversation.

Tina

Tina challenged us because she resisted the responding part. When told that the students would be bringing in videotapes of their own work, she said, "Why bother with this? That sounds boring! What can we, as students, possibly say that can be of interest to each other? We do not want to listen to each other! What really counts is to see and hear you—the teachers." Rather than argue with her about the merits of the activity (which would have constructed a competition for truth), we adapted our syllabus and allowed her to begin with the third activity, the "expanding" interview. This conversation brought her new goals and ideas about the future, and made her willing to participate in the "responding" activity.

After completing the expanding interview, she began to find it helpful to explore her fellow students' work. She said, "it is really something to see and participate in each other's practice in this way. It really makes you think and learn a lot." Tina works with teachers in public schools and has developed more comfort in her ability to participate in the development of her fellow workers.

REFLECTIONS

These experiences taught us how students call for different responses from us as their trainers. In the situation with Peter, we followed his request and for a time allowed ourselves to be "controlled" by our trainee. In this case, we let go of our "rules" with the paradoxical effect that this enabled him to accept our rules.

With Tina, we deliberately chose not to follow her request, because we did not want to support the idea that the stories of the others are less useful than the stories of the teacher. Instead, we insisted on having an episode—the "expanding" conversation—in which we made her story special and our role less important.

We seemed deaf to Helle and showed no rhetorical sensitivity at first. One idea is that we were totally preoccupied by our own newly developed concepts and ideas about the curriculum. It seems as if we develop new ideas and then for a time are consumed by them, allowing them to guide our actions no matter what. In this case, luckily, Helle insisted and called out loudly enough for us to hear her.

PROVOCATIONS

In thinking through the challenges of doing systemic training systemically, we are struck by how much these challenges are similar to those in other contexts. There is something very common in the goals of systemic training and any training that involves transformative learning by adults. We have begun the process of borrowing insights, and wonder how much more might be gained by a comparison of learnings in these fields.

The idea of using formal models such as those in the Figures as a clarifying device seems useful to us; they help us identify the untold stories. We think that the model in Figure 3 is useful in thinking through the challenges encountered by systemic trainers. And we wonder what are the untold stories in that model, and what its clarity obscures.

Not surprisingly, we did not find a linear developmental model a satisfactory way of responding to the challenges of systemic training. However, we did find that ideas of sequence are important—it is just that different students, at different times, need different things "first." Among other things, this learning oriented us away from an over-reliance on an established curriculum and toward attention to the interpersonal skills of the trainer: rhetorical sensitivity, gamesmastery, and systemic eloquence.

At the same time, we believe that a curriculum is useful. The formal structure of a training program might usefully be thought of as serving three functions:

- As the container of resources, such as ideas, models, and experiences, that enable trainees to learn to act like a native within the systemic community;
- As a set of constraints against which trainees can struggle and perhaps rebel in order to develop themselves as individual practitioners; and
- As a complex site for "openings" for specific interactions among trainers and trainees that are conducive to transformational learning.

When thinking of training this way, the syllabus (readings, assignments, exercises, demonstrations, etc.) is important, but certainly not more important than the inter-

personal skills of the trainees and the trainers. Successful trainees will take charge of their own learning at some point and in some way; they will deliberately expose themselves to challenging situations, discover their own limits and competencies, and reflect on their own experience. At the same time, successful trainers will act into openings in such a way as to provide a ratio of support and challenge enabling trainees to achieve the paradoxical task of becoming able to act systemically when the fundamental definition of systemic action is that it differs in every context and that every context is different.

Finally, we realize that our explorations of how to act into the paradox of doing systemic training systemically are not the final words. We have not drawn explicit comparisons with published accounts of other people's practices (e.g., K. A. Pearce, 2004; Kearney, 2004) and hope that others will. Our analysis of our own work has called attention to its incompleteness and invited responses. We look forward to the continued conversation.

REFERENCES

Anderson, H., & Swim, S. (1993a). Learning as collaborative conversation combining the student's and teacher's expertise. *Human Systems, 4*, 145–153.

Anderson, H., & Swim, S. (1993b). Questions beget questions: Reflections on Laura Fruggeri's rejoinder. *Human Systems, 4*, 156–160.

Barner, R. (2002). The postgraduate educational experience as a catalyst for adult cognitive development. Unpublished paper prepared for Ph.D. comprehensive examination, Fielding Graduate University, pp. 82–142.

Bateson, G. (2000). *Steps to an ecology of mind.* University of Chicago Press. (Originally published in 1972).

Baxter Magolda, M. (1992). The integration of relational and impersonal knowing in young adults' epistemological development. *Journal of College Student Development, 36*, 205–216.

Baxter Magolda, M. (2001). *Making their own way: Narratives for transforming higher eduation to promote self-development.* Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Bayon, M. C., Samper, J., & Villar, E. (1993). Learning how to teach systemic therapy. *Human Systems, 4*, 267–276.

Burnham, J. (1992). Approach—method—technique: Making distinctions and creating connections. *Human Systems, 3*, 3–26.

Burnham, J. (1993). Systemic supervision. *Human Systems, 4*, 349–381.

Cecchin, G., Lane, G., & Ray, W. (1992). *Irreverence: A strategy for therapists' survival.* London: Karnac.

Cecchin, G. (1993). A comment in three movements on the paper "knowing systemic rules . . ." *Human Systems, 4*, 253–258.

Eliot, T. S. (1942). *Little Giddings.* Retrieved on September 21, 2009, from http://www.tristan.icom43.net/quartets/gidding.html.

Fruggeri, L. (1993). How do you do: A rejoinder from Laura Fruggeri to Harlene Anderson and Susan Swim. *Human Systems, 4*, 154–156.

Hart, R. P., & Burks, D. M. (1972). Rhetorical sensitivity and social interaction. *Speech Monographs, 39*, 75–91.

Kearney, J. (2004). "Making up a masters' programme:" CMM and the co-construction of teaching and learning processes in time and space. *Human Systems, 15*, 61–76.

Kegan, R. (1998). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

King, P. M. (1992). How do we know? Why do we believe? *Liberal Education, 78*.

Korman, U., & Moen, P. (1990). The formation and subsequent integration of a "Milan" systemic team at a child psychiatric clinic in Sweden. *Human Systems, 1*, 23–28.

Lang, W. P., Little, M., & Cronen, V. E. (1990). The systemic professional: Domains of action and the question of neutrality. *Human Systems, 1*, 39–45.

Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Oliver, C. (1996). Systemic eloquence. *Human Systems, 7*, 247–264.

O'Sullivan, E. (2002). Integral education: A vision of transformative learning in a planetary context. Retrieved on October 5, 2002, from: http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~tlcentre/insights/insights.htm.

O'Sullivan, E., Morrell, A., & O'Connor, M. A., Eds. (2002). *Expanding the boundaries of transformative learning: Essays on theory and praxis*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pearce, K. A. (2004). Reconceptualizing teaching: Using CMM to change rules and relationships in the classroom. *Human Systems, 15*, 77–88.

Pearce, W. B. (1994). *Interpersonal communication: Making social worlds*. New York: HarperCollins.

Pearce, W. B., Villar Concha, E., & McAdam, E. (1992). "Not sufficiently systemic:" An exercise in curiosity. *Human Systems, 3*, 75–87.

Perry, W. G. (1999). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Radovanovic, D. M. (1993). Knowing systemic rules: From stages of disorder to second order towards positive delinquency: A true story. *Human Systems, 4*, 235–258.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wittgenstein, L. (1922). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell.