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How Learning Occurred in a Group Leadership Program: The Importance of "Ba," "Omoi," and Psychological Safety

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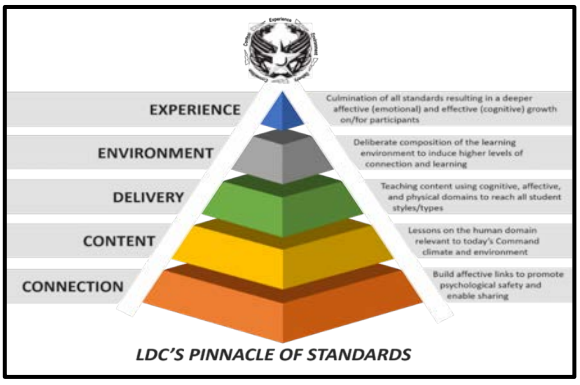
This research confirms that incorporating concepts of Ba and Omoi with action research promotes higher levels of learning. Currently, action research, Ba, and Omoi are understudied in military institutions and college programs. Using a case study approach and two cycles of action research, this project addressed how learning occurred for students and instructors in a two-term program at a military university. Findings showed how Ba and Omoi were integral in establishing a psychologically safe learning environment, learning and growth occurred on multiple levels for students and instructors as they struggled with imposter phenomenon, and students struggled with negative capability.

In 2020, instructors at the Air War College (AWC), part of the US Air Force's Air University (AU), developed a two-term elective called the Leadership Horizons Program (LHP). Led by a team of four instructors, the aim of LHP was for students to study applied leadership concepts for self and organizational development. Of the 19 students who interviewed, 15 were accepted into the program that included 11 US students and four students from other countries, and represented the Air Force, Army, and Guard/Reserve component. The 15 students were organized into four project teams, with one instructor serving as the guide for each group. Each student partnered with a selected organization and project area, and provided a combination of executive coaching, mentoring, and consulting techniques that they learned about early in the program. Of the 15 organizations, 11 were military (seven within AU) and four civilian organizations.

The teaching team consisted of four instructors who also taught the USAF's Leader Development Course (LDC), considered AU's flagship course. The LDC was created to fill a developmental leadership gap of human domain skills identified in the "Improving the Effectiveness of Air Force Squadron Commanders" report (Ausink et al., 2018) and in the follow-on study, "Improving Air Force Squadrons: Recommendations for Vitality" (Davis, 2018). The LDC is an intensive 8-day course that provides human-domain content in areas that were found to impact the key squadron vitality attributes such as knowing self, leading teams, culture, values, clarity of purpose, communications, human performance, and practical leadership application activities involving case studies, experiential, immersive virtual/augmented reality events that deliver an impactful student experience for participants (Hinck & Davis, 2020).

The unique teaching and learning techniques in LDC, termed "leadergogy" (Hinck et al., 2022) involve a variety of teaching and learning methods such as music, coaching, and improvisation (Hinck et al., 2021) that honors the voice of students and instructors as co-learners and co-teachers in a dialogic approach with shared authority. "With little to no lecture or informal lecture, emphasis is placed on more discussion as a learning tool and prompt-based discussions where learning emerges based on the readings as well as the collective knowledge, experiences, and inquiries of the group" (Hinck et al., 2022, p. 27). Students and instructors often commented on the positive impact of LDC with comments like "Life changing!" and "The best educational experience of my life" in the end of course surveys. Since its inception in 2018 with over 43 courses delivered, the LDC has the highest average rating (4.84 of 5 stars) of any course at AU because of a holistic approach that "emphasized connection before content, structured relevant content in meaningful ways, provided unique delivery that engaged all learning styles, and orchestrated the learning environment that culminated in a collectively powerful experience for all participants" (Hinck et al., 2022) as depicted in LDC's Pinnacle of Standards shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1.
LDC Pinnacle of Standards



LDC's Pinnacle of Standards begins with *Connection* that builds affective links to promote psychological safety and enable sharing, teaching human domain *Content* relevant to today's command climate

and environment via expansive *Delivery* methods that encompass all domains of learning in an *Environment* carefully orchestrated to induce higher levels of connection and learning that brings to life and culminates in an *Experience* like no other.

Due to the overwhelmingly positive aspects of LDC, the four-person instructor team for LHP wanted to create a similar positive learning environment for students in the two-term LHP so learning would be elevated. Since the students and instructors would be involved in the research process as participant-observers, an action research approach was expected to be employed in an integrated learning space that combined cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains that emphasized the relational dynamics of collaboration between students and instructors. Consequently, three questions guided this study:

RQ 1: How did learning occur for students in the LHP?
RQ 2: How did learning occur for instructors in the LHP?
RQ 3: What is the "common ground" of learnings between students and instructors?

Literature Review

Literature was reviewed and selected to help frame the study in answering the research questions. The literature review section is organized into three parts: an overview of the philosophy of action research that include the concepts of "Ba" and "Omoi," intersubjectivity and the power of learning from others, and the importance of psychological safety in creating a welcomed space for learning.

Philosophy of Action Research: Power of Ba and Omoi

Action research is a philosophy and qualitative method that seeks transformative change via cycles of action, reflection, and change (Stringer, 2014; Torbert, 2004). Action research contains varying principles which are relevant to the different fields of researchers, and which both inform and guide the general nature of research and the specific purpose of the researcher. While not exhaustive, the following elements outline key features from the more prominent researchers associated with action research.

Since Lewin (1951) coined the phrase that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (p. 169), researchers have attempted to identify the elements of a good theory of action research. Most notably, Bradbury and Reason (2009) developed six underlying principles of good action research which included (1) grounded in lived experience, (2) developed in partnership, (3) addressing significant problems, (4) working with, rather than simply studying, people, (5) developing new ways of seeing/theorizing the world, and (6) leaving infrastructure in its wake. Friedman and Rogers (2008) argued that there are six features of a non-positivist 'good' theory for action researchers: (1) sensitivity to the inherently meaningful nature of social reality, (2) going beyond categorizing events to connecting participants' perceptions to hitherto unrecognized aspects of their reasoning, behavior, and environment, and the systemic interaction of the three, (3) using concepts that were not in the original description given by participants or, perhaps, not even in their vocabulary, (4) providing a powerful set of causal concepts that enable participants to reinterpret their surface perceptions and theories, (5) providing tools for disconfirmability; that is, for helping people to discover when they are mistaken, and (6) putting causal responsibility in participants' own hands. "Good theories that help people generate more plausible explanations of their experience and increase the scope for effective action are important additions to their knowledge rather than theoretician's abstractions" (Friedman and Rogers, 2009, p. 37).

Inoue (2015) offered five key features of action research for educators: actions matter, context-specific research, multiple cycles and phases, inclusion of you as research target, and reflections matter. Yet, Inoue (2015, 2012) goes beyond traditional principles and examines how the concepts of "ba" and "omoi" are integral to the field of action research. Ba is the "social space that people create to actively engage in organic exchanges of ideas for the purpose of co-creating a new understanding" (p. 109). Omoi "implies an integrated form of thinking that is infused with one's feeling, passion, and recollections that constitute a deep-seated feeling the person has about his or her identity and role in society" (p. 137). Ba becomes the space of interactions or collaborative inquiry for creating and advancing knowledge which is linked to one's omoi and the collected knowledge of practitioners. The field of action research has many champions but not one unifying definition of what constitutes good action research that includes both students and instructors as participants that learn in the same shared space or "ba" type of classroom. Yet, there are some commonalities which emerge and connect the general nature and purpose of action research.

The common ground seems to include putting inquiry into the hands of practitioners and students which informs their practice and influences others; it is a context-specific type of research with the researcher included as part of the research target; is recursive in nature involving multiple cycles of planning, acting, assessing, and reflecting; involves collaborative inquiry or critical friends as a key element; reflexive in that it builds on the self as the primary instrument of change;

and produces a living theory which can help guide and give rise to greater significance in a wider ecology (Bradbury, 2010; Inoue, 2015; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Schon, 1983; Stringer, 2014; Whitehead, 1988).

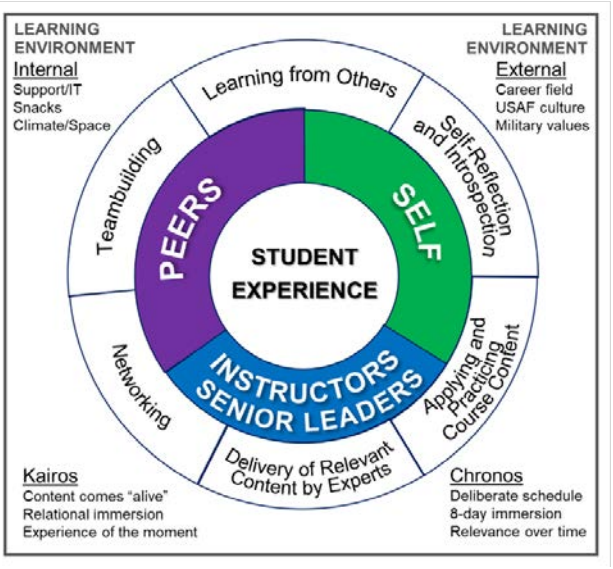
It is the infusing of eastern concepts into an emerging field of action research which illuminates the power and potential of action research as a viable method to connect theory and practice in a methodological dance. The dance can sometimes be seen from different viewpoints, especially the concepts of validity and subjectivity. Within the realms of action research, validity, especially process, ironic, and educational validity, provide the best measures of quality action research. Inoue (2015) describes these measures of validity in the following way: process validity is concerned with how research is conducted which allows for ongoing learning; ironic validity provides the opportunity to examine assumptions and beliefs in what was expected in the research process; and educational validity speaks to what extent the research informs and educates others. How well action research leads to meaning making and tacit knowledge production is clarified in the tension between subjectivity and objectivity. Where a positivist approach seeks objectivity, action research seeks a balance between what is known and what is not yet known or to be discovered. Action research contains an "open mind" about what is not yet known.

Action research, a philosophy and qualitative method that seeks transformative change via cycles of action, reflection, and change (Stringer, 2014; Torbert, 2004), is understudied in military institutions. Any educational class can temporarily form a space or "ba" (Inoue, 2012) that is a productive, meaningful learning arena. Such a space promotes an intersubjectivity expressed among the group that becomes paramount in individual and collective development for participants.

Intersubjectivity: Power of Learning from Others

Matusov (2001) develops the concept of intersubjectivity as key for educators to learn from peers, and Inoue (2010) stresses the importance of learning from others' perspectives and viewpoints via social dialogues. The Student Experience Ecosystem (SEE) Model 2.0 reinforces peer learning and learning from others' perspectives including oneself (Hinck & Davis, 2020), as depicted in Figure 2. The Student Experience Ecosystem Model defines a measure of "impact" of a leader development course in three ways: area of impact (what topics were most effective in instruction), level of impact (how topics will be applied in the future), and depth of impact (why the course was effective) (Hinck & Davis, 2021). The depth of impact was seen as being in an ecosystem of interconnectedness between the human microsystem (interactions with instructors, peers, and self) and six overlapping elements—the exosystem. Together, the elements brought the student experience to life, allowing for deeper and more meaningful learning.

Figure 2.
Student Experience Ecosystem (SEE) Model 2.0

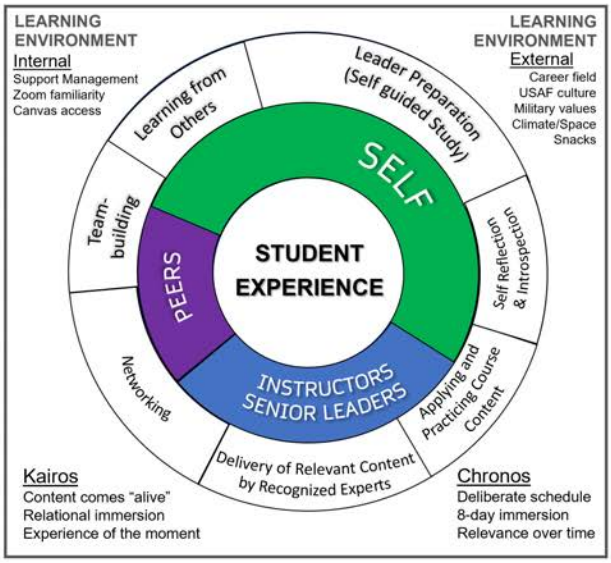


The SEE Model 2.0 was expanded through additional research to highlight in even more detail how to orchestrate the learning environment to optimize growth, and it was also applied to leader development education taking place in online, live venues, as many educators found themselves doing during and since the Covid-19 pandemic, with the creation of the virtual or vSEE model (Hinck & Davis, 2022). A heavier reliance on self-reflection and introspection became even more important for learning in a virtual setting (Hinck & Davis, 2022) as depicted in Figure 3. The "instructor" experience was just as important to consider as the student experience. The SEE model 2.0 and vSEE models incorporate a holistic learning environment between, for, and with students and instructors.

Psychological Safety: Creating a Welcomed Space for Learning

Psychological safety can be defined as the perceptions of associated consequences of taking interpersonal risks in a particular context such as a workplace or learning environment (Edmondson 1999). Psychological safety was first explored in the 1960s, but research lagged in this area for decades after. A renewed purpose for psychological safety started in the mid-1990s with attributions centering on the growth of organizational innovation of the effects on learning.

Figure 3.
Virtual or vSEE Model



Psychological safety is key to enabling effective learning processes that induce reflective thought or critical thinking (Edmondson, 1999, 2004). When coupled with a learning environment that suspends judgement, practices healthy skepticism resulting in the rejection of traditional presumptions, and encourages open mindedness, psychological safety promotes greater exploration of ideas and learning (Dewey, 1933, 1986). Since the learning process requires members to be engaged in a cyclic process of asking questions, seeking feedback, testing, reflection of outcomes, discussion of errors or unexpected outcomes of actions, and admitting faults (Edmondson, 1999), the importance of members sharing the belief they are psychologically safe becomes paramount. Ultimately, creating psychological safety within an organization or learning environment is highly desirable and necessary to maximize performance and learning. Efforts to construct psychological safety should primarily be about reducing interpersonal risk, which necessarily accompanies uncertainty and change of, and for, the individual (Schein & Bennis, 1965). Reflecting this premise, a rapidly growing body of conceptual and empirical research focusing on understanding the characteristics of psychological safety, identifying factors that contribute to this interpersonal construct, and examining its implications for organizations and learners.

Conversations and a "welcomed" space for learning with peers are paramount in helping students and instructors broaden and deepen understanding of the areas required for increased competency and confidence in learning and teaching. This project will build upon existing studies in action research, inform the larger academic community about how students and instructors learn in parallel because of a process of Action-Reflection-Change, and provide important feedback to Air University on how learning occurred in the Air War College's (AWC's) Leadership Horizons Program.

Method

Trustworthiness and credibility are concepts as sources of rigor for all research designs and requires elaboration when conducting action research (Dick, 1999). To pass the test of rigor, action research is seen as an emergent methodology which includes the characteristics of participative, qualitative, action-oriented, and emergent. "Method and data and interpretation develop simultaneously, and from cycle to cycle" (p. 3). In identifying five qualities of self-study research using a narrative framework, Craig (2009) builds a stronger argument for trustworthiness. The five qualities are: 1) intentional human action linked to human knowledge growth, 2) social and contextually situated, 3) engaging selves and others in interrogating aspects of teaching, and 4) learning by 'storying' experience, implicating identities, toward 5) construction of meaning and knowledge. The elements of linking action to knowledge and on socially and contextually construction of meaning and knowledge are key elements in this research design.

Participants

The research design was a blended approach using case study and action research that involved 15 students and four instructors (n = 19). Two action research cycles of action-reflection-change were used as the research process along with a "critical friends" approach for performance and learning feedback. Cycle 1 occurred over a 3-month period in the Fall of 2020. Cycle 2 occurred over a 3-month period in the Spring of 2021.

Data Collection

Data was collected via 10 questions in end-of-course surveys (n = 15) with Likert scales and open-ended questions developed by AWC that measured instructor performance and improvement, course objectives and AWC program objectives, beneficial aspects of course, and how to improve the course. Additionally, emails were sent to students (n = 15) and instructors (n = 4) that invited students to answer two questions: 1.) *What did you learn that is still present with you?* and 2.) *How did that learning occur?* Informal follow-up interviews (n = 6) were conducted to clarify answers.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics from the surveys and coding of the qualitative answers on open-ended survey questions, as well as a cumulative coding process of answers from emailed questions and informal interviews for thematic analysis (convergence and divergence). To understand the relationship of the data, four coding cycles were used: pre-codes that came from the literature and survey questions, initial coding of the data using values and descriptive codes, followed by pattern, axial, and focused coding to grouping the codes into categories that finally led to themes. Two researchers performed the coding with 98% inter-rater reliability. The main differences were in the values and descriptive coding that were resolved, and any differences mitigated when moving into the categorical coding.

Findings

The cumulative coding process from the 10 questions in end-of-course surveys (n = 15) collected in two cycles and answers to two questions in emails (n =19) and follow-up interviews (n = 6) produced 29 categories that were organized into four parts. Each part shows progressive understanding of participant voices: 1) findings from Cycle 1—student end-of-course surveys and instructor interviews, Fall 2020; 2) findings from Cycle 2—student end-of-course surveys and instructor interviews, Spring 2021; 3) participant voices for "improvements;" and 4) participant voices for "sustains." Participant quotes from end-of-course surveys, answers to emailed questions, and responses during informal interviews are used to support the development of categories for "improvements" and "sustains." Finally, themes are presented that emerged from the 29 categories.

Findings from Cycle 1: Fall 2020 (Seven Categories)

1. High student learning on course content.
2. Applying knowledge in creative ways that served client growth.
3. Parallel instructor learning about roles, pedagogy, and guiding students during projects.
4. Students reported the challenge of varied pedagogy that included the use of silence, asking students to answer their own questions, the use of one-word/one-breath closeouts of class sessions, and emergent way of class progressing/unfolding.
5. Struggle with Theory U concepts of "letting go to let come" and "sitting in no knowing" regarding individual and organizational transformation/change.
6. Students with previous coaching experience were at an "advantage" when working with clients (reported by students with little to no coaching experience who felt like an imposter in the beginning stages of coaching).
7. Desire for more "structure" in class and on assignments to aid in knowing expectations.

Findings from Cycle 2: Spring 2021 (Seven Categories)

1. Indicated a scaffolded process of learning that included self-learning (self in relation to other students, self in relation to instructors, and self in relation to client), and peer-learning (collaborative learning on project teams and coaching circles).
2. High increased student competence in course concepts.
3. Moderate increased student confidence in using skills of coaching, mentoring, and consulting with selected clients.
4. High increased competence and confidence in instructors based on group teaching, individual teaching, and individual guiding of coaching circles.
5. Early feelings of imposter phenomenon and struggle with negative capability that was suppressed until a collective disclosure around midpoint in the course during instruction on imposter phenomenon.
6. An ardent desire for more training and education related to leadership coaching.
7. Strong psychological safety felt—underpinned the "ba" concept of a learning environment.

Participant Voices "Improvements" (Eight Categories)

1. Holding the learning moment (10 participants). "*Some student questions were turned back to them to answer….that was annoying.*"
2. More structure vs emergent structure (nine participants). "*Challenges in how the large group was less structured and was more freely emergent than the other learning activities*."
3. No change needed (eight participants). "*Don't change anything*."
4. More time to self-directed exploration (six participants). "*Provide less structure to allow students to explore their learning edge in terms of boundaries, authority, roles, and tasks—forcing them to lean into the discomfort for self-discovery*."
5. Increase student enrollment in the program (six participants). "*It would be great if more*

students could benefit from the LHP. I think the program needs to be expanded and more instructors taught to follow this model of teaching."

6. More coverage of readings (five participants). "*More coverage of the assigned readings*."
7. No linkage to strategic competition or international component (three participants). "*The course had little linkage or discussion regarding strategic competition/great power competition or international component or cover contemporary issues*."
8. Timelier feedback (three participants) "*Feedback on my written work could have been timelier.*"

Participant Voices "Sustains" (Seven Categories)

1. Safe/supportive learning environment (14 participants). "*Freedom to maneuver, discover, learn, and serve clients in individual and productive ways. The personal development as a leader was incredibly beneficial as I developed connections with faculty, students, and my clients. The experiential learning aspect of the course was excellent. By creating the right environment where people feel safe it is amazing the insight you can get on someone. Creating a safe, comfortable space where all are valued and encouraged to participate, the virtual learning environment can be as effective. Psychological safety, when properly nurtured and reinforced by the 'in group' can be an amazingly powerful force for inviting new members to join and fully participate. I learned about the goodness that a psychologically safe environment, in a virtual environment, could do to help see the world in a different way. LHP provided me with a psychologically safe place to not only share when it was my turn, but by demonstrating what psychological safety looks and feels like so OTHERS could share."*
2. Emotional growth (13 participants). "*Leaders who practice reflecting on how what they are learning impacts them and others. Most of the learning occurred in this class through directly experiencing the very human issues and emotions people brought to the conversations. I have learned much more about knowing when to hear other people and when to share my perspective. I learned that there is balance between the 'letting go to let come' methodology and 'we have a mission/objective to achieve' requirement. I learned through discussions and reflections from other students through the guided discussions we had after the readings.*"
3. Relationships and sense of community (11 participants). "*The relationships that we built in our Leadership Circle and the sense of community that we all shared together as a class was incredibly rewarding and taught me so much. I still feel connected with the other students from the course. The personal development as a leader was incredibly beneficial as I developed connections with faculty, students, and my clients. All voices (students and instructors) were heard and valued.*"
4. Self-reflection (11 participants). "*The self-reflection and small group discussion coupled with that practical learning definitely helped me sharpen my leadership philosophy. Self-reflection and sharing with others helped the class learn*."
5. Parallel learning process (10 participants). "*Being able to work through some needed changes I had to deal with during this period of time in my life. LHP has helped me become a better person, spouse, parent, leader, officer, and friend. I learned as much in class as I did when I applied our concepts at home.*"
6. Immediacy of application (eight participants). "*The ability to grow in a way as an officer and human being that I can take and use immediately. I felt that as a result of our work in this course we were able to make an immediate impact on the AF*."
7. Coaching core competencies (seven participants). "*Connections, practicing skills like listening and empathy, learning new things about coaching. Helped me learn what I didn't know. The opportunity to coach an actual client was the best part of the course*."

Emergence of Themes

Table 1 shows the 29 categories that are linked or led to the emergence of six general themes. Some categories support more than one theme.

Discussion

The discussion section explores the themes from the findings in relation to the literature by grouping themes together for three discussion sections: 1) imposter phenomenon and negative capability, 2) psychological safety and "ba," and 3) parallel learning processes and "omoi."

Table 1
Categories to Themes

Categories	Themes
6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	Imposter Phenomenon
4, 5, 7, 13, 15, 29	Negative Capability
8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 23, 24	Psychological Safety
1, 3, 10, 11, 27	Parallel Learning
2, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 28	Ba
10, 11, 24, 26	Omoi

Imposter Phenomenon and Negative Capability

Students reported the challenge of varied teaching and learning methods that included the use of silence, asking students to answer their own questions, the use of one-word/one-breath closeouts of class sessions, and emergent way of class progressing/unfolding based on student discussions and answers to prompts (prompt-based discussion format). The different and unique style of teaching and learning, often called "leadergogy" (Hinck et al., 2022) may have been so new to students that it inadvertently caused the initial discomfort in the learning process and evoked them to feel unsure about the class.

Students and instructors struggled with imposter phenomenon (Mak et al., 2019) and students struggled with negative capability in their change projects (Bate, 2012; French, 2001) and in their leader development (Simpson, French & Harvey, 2002). Early feelings of imposter phenomenon by participants and students' struggle with negative capability was suppressed until a collective disclosure occurred around midpoint in the course. It was the intervention of a short instruction on imposter phenomenon and negative capability that allowed the issues to surface for the group and discussed in a healthy way. Instruction on imposter phenomenon and negative capability should be done earlier in future courses. The discussion of imposter phenomenon is particularly important for new instructors who may mask feelings of low confidence and competence (Davis & Hinck, 2021; Hinck et al., 2021). The discussion on negative capability is critical for students who may not be comfortable with sitting in the unknown space that can help generate new ideas or novel interventions in their role as learner or student-coach (French, 2001; Hinck, 2022; Simpson, French & Harvey, 2002).

Psychological Safety and "Ba"

Establishing an environment that is psychologically safe is paramount for learning and sharing (Edmondson, 2004; Dewey, 1986; Schein & Bennis, 1965). Creating a shared space that invites feelings of community, being valued, encouraged to participate, and held by the group are critical for how "Ba" and "Omoi" (Inoue, 2012) were integral in establishing a positive, psychologically safe learning environment (Edmonson, 2004). It was the very nature of feeling safe to share something vulnerable without judgment from others that allowed the continuance of a collective and accelerated learning space throughout the course. Instructors need to model being vulnerable and judgment-free so other participants feel good enough and safe enough to share something vulnerable or self-critical. The findings reinforce the importance of psychological safety in higher education classrooms (Bourner & Flowers, 1999; Hackathorn, et al., 2011) and in adult, graduate level learning.

Parallel Learning Processes and "Omoi"

Learning and growth occurred on multiple levels for both students and instructors. While students were learning content, instructors felt and discussed a similar process of learning teaching skills. Seventy-five percent of students reported a parallel process of learning how to apply course material to their change project as well as in other areas of their life, particularly the home environment. This parallel process of learning and developing/applying course content is not new in higher education programs (Fischer & Grant, 1995; Rugg & D'Agnese, 2013; Rugg, 2014) and could be a critical discussion point earlier in the class schedule so students are aware of the processes. The scaffolded processes of learning included self-learning (self in relation to other students, self in relation to instructors, and self in relation to client), and peer-learning (collaborative learning on project teams and coaching circles). Parallel instructor learning occurred in their role as a teacher and learner, varied use of teaching/learning methods, and guiding students during projects.

The learning occurred on multiple levels because foundational elements from leadership (Heifetz, 1998; Hinck, 2021), teaching and learning (Bourner & Flowers, 1999; Hackathorn et al., 2011), and group relations (Alderfer, 1980; Green & Molenkamp, 2005) and discussion as a teaching tool (Brookfield & Preskill, 1997) were covered early in the course. The Theory U concepts of the voices of judgment, cynicism, and fear, "letting go to let come" and "leading from the future as it emerges" (Scharmer, 2009) seemed most valuable in setting a foundation for learning that allowed participants a common language upon which to discuss their resistance and challenges for self and their change projects. The emotional growth was as important as the cognitive growth and supported stronger emotional connections between participants (Hinck & Davis, 2021). Learning from peers (Matusov, 2001) was as important as learning from instructors (Davis & Hinck,

2020; Hinck & Davis, 2022), as well as the learning from others' perspectives and viewpoints via social dialogues (Inoue, 2010). The learning supported the collaborative inquiry or critical friends as keys element; reflexive in that it builds on the self as the primary instrument of change; and produces a living theory that can help guide and give rise to greater significance in a wider ecology of the learning environment (Bradbury, 2010; Hinck & Davis, 2020; Inoue, 2012; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011; Schon, 1983; Stringer, 2014; Whitehead, 1988). Psychological safety, parallel learning processes, and students stepping into a new and more confident version of themselves demonstrates that learning and teaching can occur in new ways when a holistic approach is used that situates instructors AND students in the process of creating a "ba" with "omoi" that embraces self-reflection, peer feedback, and using a "critical friend" approach to learning.

Conclusion and Implications

A case study approach used two cycles of action research to answer how learning occurred for students and instructors in a two-term Leadership Horizons Program at the USAF's Air University. Data analysis from a cumulative coding process on data collected from end-of-course surveys (n = 15), answers to emailed questions (n = 19), and follow-up interviews (n = 6) produced 29 categories that led to the emergence of six themes: Imposter Phenomenon, Negative Capability, Psychological Safety, Parallel Learning, Ba, and Omoi. Findings showed how Ba and Omoi were integral in establishing a positive, psychologically safe learning environment, learning and growth occurred on multiple levels and parallel ways for both students and instructors, students and instructors struggled with imposter phenomenon, and students struggled with negative capability. Incorporating the concepts of Ba and Omoi with elements of action research promoted higher levels of learning. Ba and Omoi served to elevate action research in relation to transformative change via cycles of action, reflection, and change, and enhance the overall student experience by promoting a more psychological safe learning environment.

There are five implications that inform professional military education and the wider civilian education field.

- Students and instructors struggled with imposter phenomenon and students struggled with negative capability in the different learning environment; both concepts should be discussed early in a class structure.
- Learning and growth on multiple levels occurred for students and instructors that was reciprocal and deepened learning and application of concepts.
- Students and instructors learned in multiple parallel processes because of a process of Action-Reflection-Change with creation of a learning space or "ba."
- The use of "Ba" and "Omoi" in PME courses should be encouraged to improve learning environment.
- As new classes and programs are designed, findings from this study can provide valuable lessons and insights to aid other PME institutions and the wider education field on key integrated or holistic use of "Ba," "Omoi," psychological safety, and parallel learning processes.

Based on the implications and literature, the research adds action research as a method to the understudied approach in Professional Military Education (PME) institutions and validates the new Leadership Horizons Program, a two-term elective series at AWC with areas for growth based on student and instructor feedback.

While this research built upon existing studies in action research, it cogently informed the larger academic community about how students and instructors learn in parallel; elevates the concepts of Ba and Omoi as integral for a positive, psychologically safe learning environment; and provides important feedback in measuring institutional effectiveness. The philosophy and qualitative method of action research with characteristics of Ba and Omoi should continue to be studied in military institutions and college programs.

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