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# The Social Construction of Transformation

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*Ten Industrial Areas Foundation national community organizers were interviewed about their experiences of organizing in broad-based organizations. All were trainers and all shared stories of how participation in action facilitated transformation personally and socially. Three stories were chosen as exemplars for how transformation occurs in relationship-based organizing. They illustrate three themes: freedom from victimization, freedom from slavery, and use of controlled anger. Imagination, relationships, disequilibrium, internalization, and changes in consciousness are processes that seemed to bridge the rational with the emotional as the social is constructed in participative action.*

*Keywords: personal transformation; social transformation; social action; leadership development; social learning*

Efforts to reorganize urban life to increase the material quality of life of citizens in the process transforms their own lives. The research seeks to show to what extent transformation occurs in individuals who take leadership roles in broad-based organizations (BBO). Ten community organizers were interviewed. Of these I have chosen the stories of three to present in this article as exemplars for what all of the organizers experienced. Emerging out of church and synagogue communities and familiar with storytelling as a way of teaching, organizers use stories as personal and historical examples to inspire imagination. Transformation is not only a personal phenomenon but also is socially constructed and linked with building relationships and participative action as leaders learn in a powerful social action context.

Learning that occurs in group activities is foundational to adult education. From earliest records, adult education has a rich tradition of social action for democratic renewal as illustrated by such pioneers as Lindeman (Stewart, 1987; Stubblefield, 1988), Moses Coady (Welton, 2001), Myles Horton (Bell, Gaventa, & Peters, 1990; Jarvis, 1987), and from social and worker movements (Holst, 2002; Schied & Zacharakis-Jutz, 1993; Spencer, 2002). In spite of the historical

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roots, transformation from a social action perspective is often viewed primarily as political and social rather than educative. New and old social movements, where undeniable social change and learning occur, have not been systematically included in the literature on transformative learning. Even though adult educators have Paulo Freire's theoretical framework as a prime example of social action, the image of adult educators as cultural workers is on the periphery of adult education. Continual pleas by Brookfield (2000) and others to engage in critical reflection on power relationships and hegemonic assumptions as pathways toward transformative learning have met with little overall success in the contested adult education movement.

Adult education has increasingly focused on the nature of the individual in learning situations. Mezirow (1991, 2000) has unfortunately decoupled transformative learning from the dimension of societal structures in the mechanisms of transformative learning theory. Nevertheless, the complexity of the learner as a nonunified self and as a cognitive being who restructures his or her perspectives and habits of mind (Mezirow, 2000) has intrigued adult educators interested in fostering transformation in learning. Constructivism in higher education contexts can help students on their journeys toward change by careful attention to the bridges between learners' old perspectives and emerging new ones (Kegan, 2000). Constructing new habits of mind requires processes and situations for learning that are conducive to transformation as these influence the possibility that individuals will transform. For this article, individual construction of reality is contrasted with the social construction of reality and includes not only transformation of the mind but also of the body, and not only the personal body but of the body politic. The strategy is critically reflective dialogue incorporating an active questioning process of invisible assumptions about the self, society, role, and responsibility that have been internalized and acted on (Taylor, 2000). Dialogical learning processes can serve to liberate thinking and action as individuals then are free to try out new behavior. Thus, it is the individual who changes first, not society. In this vein of thinking, carefully designed educational programs can prepare the learner to contribute to society and become an active responsible citizen.

Drawing from this range of literature, there are several assumptions in this work. First, transformation requires a structural change (Scott, 1999) at the personal level, that is, a worldview change, a developmental stage change, a personality change, and/or an irreversible public role change. The psychic structures within an individual that are subject to change revolve around psychoanalytic discoveries of the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. Transformation also requires social structural changes in institutions (churches, schools, community associations, unions), city administrative structures, and market-driven businesses and corporations. All of these social structures constitute the body politic. Second, the conversation around narratives/stories as a domain of poststructuralism is contentious for this research. There are elements of postmodern/poststructuralism in the stories of transformation presented here as they are told and heard, but the point is that the intention behind these stories was to bring about structural changes within the individual and within urban so-

cial structures. Third, there is an assumption that BBO is a legitimate venue for adult learning and citizenship development, as a manifestation of nonformal/informal learning. Although literature exists dealing with the dynamics of politics, theology, racism, diversity, community development, social action strategies, and power in broad-based organizing, little of the literature has focused on learning and transformation in large social organizations that have achieved notable successes.

This article provides an overview of the various theories that inform the research and presents a new research context to broaden theory on transformation. A brief history of broad-based organizing provides the reader with a foundation for the magnitude of this community organizing effort. The heart of the article is a section on storytelling as a way of learning about relationship-based organizing. Three stories are presented that describe the public dimension of story. The nature of transformation in social learning attempts to weave transformation theory with the narratives and the learning of the organizers from those stories. The summary revisits the five processes for transformation derived from this research.

## The Research

The data presented here comes from interviews with ten community organizer/trainers in a national network called the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The author attended two 10-day training sessions, the first time in 1981 and later in 1997, and participated in two broad-based organizations, one for 12 years. The focus of the interviews was on the nature of their work, what they do daily as organizers, the possibility of transformation emanating from their work, and some background material/stories on their lives and why they do what they do. The data were collective at two times, at the 1997 national training lab in New Orleans and in 1998 in a trip to Texas. Some organizers were interviewed more than once and all were sent transcripts for verification after the interviews. The intention of this article is to highlight the transformative effects, using narrative to describe how they saw transformation occurring in the individuals with whom they worked.

The 10 organizers interviewed for this study are highly skilled with experience organizing people ranging from 6 years to 30 years. They have direct knowledge of structural changes in individuals and in urban and regional political units. Three of the women are religious in the Catholic church. One man was a Baptist minister in the South and another organizer was a former Jesuit. Three are Black, 2 Hispanic, and 5 are White. Five are men and 5 are women. All of the organizers are lead organizers in local organizations that they oversee in their various cities, and most teach in the IAF 10-day training labs that meet four times a year.

These organizers are adept at storytelling and know the importance and power of storytelling to stir the imagination. Metaphors, analogies, and ancient images in Biblical stories are used by their organizations to penetrate mechanized crusts,

frozen bodies, or hardened attitudes, and are focused and aimed for hearts and souls to intrude into the possible, the imaginations of people. One organizer is clear: "We're after their souls." They seem to know by time-tested work that stories, particularly those from the Biblical myth, engage people's imaginations, forcing community members to come back, to participate in building a social vision to sustain democracy. The three stories chosen for this article characterize themes to which the other seven organizers refer, that is, freedom from victimization, freedom from slavery, and the use of controlled anger.

These organizers see that the church is a legitimate mediator for spirituality, something that is unanimously being questioned globally. They began their own processes of dealing with a "disenchanted world" by remembering their moral and philosophical roots in a religious tradition that is rapidly dying in most industrial nations. In their experience, spiritual formation that does not recognize a concern for the world is simply self-indulgence. Social activism that is not grounded in the life of the spirit does not endure without becoming self-righteously judgmental or despairing or both. Spirituality for these organizers is a corporate act, not an individual phenomenon, in an open, generous, warm, and embracing community of diverse people. The postmodern individualistic tendencies of individuals taking responsibility alone, disconnected from the public domain, and working to eke out a quality of life dependent on their own ingenuities, is not relevant for these people. Spirituality, as something other worldly, a feeling of being detached and outside the body, is not the soul-work at play here. Soul-work (Hillman, 1996; Moore, 1987; Sardello, 1996) is concerned with the body, with relationships, as contested as they often are, and with the everyday, often messy world of meaning.

Through the three stories presented here, I hope to show that there seem to be in-depth structural changes as well as social structure changes that occur in the "action" of people who participate in the creation of these large community organizations. Transformation as metamorphosis, as a cocoon into a butterfly, is a change in form in the individual, the small social group, and the body politic. The next section is a brief background history of the IAF explicated in other writings (Ellis & Scott, 2003; Gecan, 2002; Greider, 1992; Knoepfle, 1990; Rogers, 1990; Rooney, 1995; Scott, 2001; Warren, 1995, 2001).

## The Origins of a Training Institute for Organizers

The story of the IAF effort that became so widespread in the United States in the late 1990s began in the 1950s. Saul Alinsky had a social vision for how to reconstruct what he perceived to be democracy in decline. He also had a strong desire to bring about justice for the poor. Some called this a utopian vision, others saw it as work to bring about an alternative social order. Whatever was intended, it has unfolded over the past 50 years, inspiring the imaginations of thousands of people. Alinsky, trained as a sociologist at the University of Chicago, was particularly tuned to the struggles of the urban poor, as this was his childhood. He was

quick to see that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, in Chicago where he worked and worldwide. He anticipated that with economic globalization the "structural readjustment" policies directed by corporate capital investment in developing countries would boost the income potential of corporations but rape the landscape environmentally, culturally, socially, and politically. National governments played a complicit role in allowing this to happen, and the electorate was lulled by images that didn't tell the full story. Alinsky used his uncommon sense of humor to outwit those in power in government. He created new stories that were critical of hegemonic assumptions, and agitated traditional leaders to play outside the rules of the game. The stories, polarizing the poor against the rich, slicing the issues cleanly, and forcing the powerful to make their interests publicly transparent, are legendary; they amuse the general citizenry and irritate politicians, the target of the ridicule.

Alinsky saw after about 10 years that he alone could not wage the kind of massive organizing that was needed to right the wrongs of society. He traveled across the Midwest and to Texas, setting up about 10 active broad-based organizations before his death in 1972. His vision was to train community organizers to facilitate, guide, and partner with community leaders and followers to make social change. He and those who he trained personally (e.g., Ed Chambers and Dick Harmon) set up the IAF as a training school for organizers and leaders committed to bringing about social change. IAF is primarily church-based and heavily supported by the Catholic church. The mix of the organizations needed to make an active, diverse, citywide organization include churches (protestant and Catholic), school councils, labor unions, and community agencies. The goals of this citywide organization of organizations is to strengthen these groups who have traditionally provided mediation and conflict resolution between families and governmental and private services.

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the development of BBOs and their trained organizers had spread to 65 cities in the United States and in England. The largest organization is in Chicago, called United Power for Action and Justice, with 200 organizations in alliance; other large organizations are the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, with 80 organizations; Metro-Alliance in San Antonio; and the Los Angeles Interfaith Organization. The community organizers interviewed for this study come from Texas, the Midwest, Pacific Northwest, and Florida. In the 1980s, the IAF organizers switched from the Alinsky-style interest group model of organizing to relationship-based organizing, using power in relationships to act collectively. This merits a bit of explanation. Relationship-based organizing within the BBO and within the whole citywide body politic was a strategic shift to accomplish two things. One was to align collective belief systems (primarily Christian) and ways of acting, avoiding the confrontive attacks on elected officials and public servants by citizens in a large mass meeting. Although the aggressive attacks certainly made transparent the hegemonic assumptions, power relationships, and, above all, how those in power saw their constituencies (as simply means to the end of getting elected), the new leadership reduced the use of this tactic. What the groups learned is that it is best not

to alienate someone in power with polarization tactics when that public relationship is important to future issues. Time-tested ways of accomplishing organizational goals through relationships proved more fruitful. Accountability nights (as illustrated in the third story in this research) certainly still exist, but the intention is to hold elected and appointed officials accountable to what they have promised. Second, IAF organizers were able to sustain new organizations more easily if they were built on love and respect where Alinsky's early organizations usually died within 10 or so years. A focus on building relationships was an attempt to sustain these large citywide organizations that were primarily funded by the people themselves.

Called alliances or networks, not coalitions, these new structures in society constitute a forum for citizens to learn about people different from themselves and to forge a deeper conception of the common good. The aim of these organizations is to develop leaders, develop the imagination of citizens in participatory democracy, and be successful on issues in the self-interests of citizens in the organizations that belong to the broad-based organization. "Lay leaders appear motivated to join the IAF network, and to sustain their participation, for three interrelated reasons: self-interest in the material gains to be had through IAF organizing, a religiously inspired caring for community, and the opportunity for personal development and power" (Warren, 2001, p. 216). Organizations sponsored by the IAF are some of the most successful community-based organizations in the United States.

### Storytelling as a Way of Learning Relationship-Based Organizing

The organizations that make up the IAF are founded on relationships, expressed by telling and listening to each other's stories as a key way to begin the relationship building. The stories the organizers told were of people who had been key to their own development or whom they had nurtured into leadership. The stories show a common theme, a relationship between leader and apprentice, or leader/organizer and a small group in a cohesive social context. The stories told in one-on-one meetings and in small group meetings produced a variety of transformations that led to public action from this strategy. First, people connect with the ancestors of their own stories (often repressed material) and those of others, through building community and social capital. Sharing life histories in groups can be personally deep, producing gains in self-knowledge, and social knowledge such as leadership skills. This process can be cathartic and seems to release/free people for confident action in the public arena as leaders. Second, through a combination of hermeneutic understandings of the social and material conditions of those ancestors and causal explanations for their actions, it is possible to translate the past to potential transformative practices. Identification of the root causes for social conditions informs the selection of issues to be worked. While substantive social change in the lifeworld of citizens occurs in participative action, the *real*

work, as described by these community organizers/research participants, is the development of critical and politically conscious citizens. Third, grounding community organizing in relationships requires practice in building and holding onto relationships. Critical for public relationships are relationships to one's self; and to begin that process, one has to know who she/he is and who her allies are.

## Public Dimension of Story

The first story I relate is about an organizer's own transformation on encountering the experience of a young Haitian abused as a child. This image, reflecting Bob's own abuse experience, radically changed his relationship to his victimized inner child. The emotional baggage of victimization had constrained his way of being for many years. Through the public disclosure of stories and the identification with another's story, Bob learned compassion toward his inner image in a way that had eluded him. The second story is about a woman who drew her insights from the Exodus story in the Bible intimately. Her imagination was inspired by the mytho-poetic story (Dirkx, 2000a, 2000b) as she connected her neighborhood with being in "slavery in Egypt." The power of the myth, her faith and stamina to be free to "reach the promised land" propelled her into leadership to make something happen. The third story is about Chris and her ability to convert anger that blocked her from attaining a public role as a competent controlled public leader. The purpose for telling these stories in the community is for instruction in relationship and community building of a broad-based organization (new structure in the lifeworld) and to highlight the nature of transformation (personal and social) that is possible in participative action.

### BOB AND THE HAITIAN

This is about an organizer's own transformation as he encountered the story of a young Haitian who had a similar story to his. The image of the young abused child, in the organizer's own personal experience, radically changed the emotional baggage of being a victim that constrained his behavior. The story is told by Bob, an organizer who at the time lived in New York City. He had just completed a training session the night before, and one of his organizers told him the following story:

A young Haitian who in evening Institute meetings, two hours every week, finally bursts out in his small group, after many meetings of saying literally nothing, "Let me tell you something, you have no idea how I feel here. You have no idea," he's saying. . . . "I don't know why I keep coming to these things. Marianne here, she's been picking me up but I've been telling her that, you know, I don't have a woman, I don't have a job, I can't pay my rent, I don't know why I'm coming to these things. . . . Last week you did this thing where you talked about a million people lost their jobs in New York over a ten-year period. I always thought when I couldn't get a job in this town . . . every time I got knocked off a job or



couldn't find a job I felt it was because of me. But you're telling me a million people lost their jobs and they're on welfare. . . . Now look at that [he points to the spiralling helix of Erik Erickson's stages of development that the organizer had just explained to the group]. You see that first stage there? Trust, you call it basic trust," he says. "That's me, I never have trusted anybody in my whole life because my step-parents in Trinidad, the way I would be punished as a baby, as a kid, they would lock me in a room. . . . That's why, that's why. Do you understand . . . how I feel?"

Bob says he was emotionally overwhelmed by this story. He had to go walking, all day. The Haitian was different than he was but they had a common grounding, in many ways. The small kid in Bob was just as angry, due to the violence in his own family of origin, being locked in a closet for many hours. He had tried to "work" with his small abused child over the years, but he said "every time the kid has been dead with anger or just inert suffering. Now the kid is alive because there is, literally, a field of energy around the kid that has to do with compassion. Now, where did that discovery come from? It came from [the Haitian] telling his story. Okay? And so that's what I mean by slightly altered perception of your own story. I got a new interpretation of an essential part of my own story."

Consciously he knew his story of anger for being abused had historical roots, in the Depression and in the wounds passed down through generations. But the Haitian plunged him into another level where the organizer began to see himself as a victim, like the Haitian.

All of a sudden you see the victim transformed by the act of a man who's doomed . . . he and I were in the same prison. And what we had been struggling for was somebody to open the door; give me the key to open the door, that's my freedom. . . . I had to get this context through what this man gave me. . . . His story was a gift.

It is important to recognize that anger always hides something that wants to be experienced. Bob seemed to be open to the anger of the Haitian. Attention to the memory required Bob to feel the pain again. Both Bob and the Haitian had experienced a violation of the trust, that parents would keep them safe while they were growing up. Before the healthy ego could be established fully, the unconscious was violated and there was anger at this betrayal. Although rationally Bob understood the reasons for the betrayal, he never truly forgave his caregivers. Presented with a story similar to his and experiencing another's anger and pain opened him up, uncovered his own shame, and pierced him again as he relived his experience. It takes courage to experience again the neglected feelings of helplessness. But the ability to perceive the other while simultaneously perceiving one's own reality helps dissolve the dualism between the two. It also provides for a third inner space that surrounds trust and betrayal, and it is called forgiveness. Forgiveness is needed both for those who betrayed Bob and for the hurt inner child that had victimized him for so long.

For Bob, "As people tell their stories of these kinds of struggles to each other, and it's integrated, they're struggling for the public dimensions or reasons. There are psychological and contextual, cultural and economic reasons. People were going nuts for all kinds of reasons." Those reasons are then contextualized historically, that is, what were the economic conditions of the times, and what support did the families have for their emotional and economic problems. The young Haitian was unable to support himself (a social structural problem) and the organizer's grandfather was unable to provide for his family during the Depression (another social problem).

#### OPAL AND A LEADER

A second story is told by an organizer, called Opal in this research, who worked with a young woman involved in a broad-based organization and developed into a leader through her faith and confidence in the Exodus story, freedom from slavery.

I worked with a woman in San Antonio who talked about her experience with COPS, an organization in San Antonio, being similar to, or she felt like, a Hebrew that was led out of Egypt into the promised land. She compared her experience in the neighborhood as being in slavery in that they didn't have adequate housing; the drainage was terrible; in fact, people died because it was so bad when it rained. Children were going to below-average schools, terrible public schools and once COPS started organizing in that parish and she became active she was able to start major new housing there. Twenty years later, if you go back, at least 20 or 30 blocks of new houses have been put in, and it was all because she initiated it and worked with the organization to put that new housing in. She talks about that experience as being led from Egypt out of captivity into a different land, into a promised land. . . . And I have not seen these kinds of changes in other types of work I've done.

In community organizing, this organizer, among the others in this research, looked for people who have some imagination. "You want to look for someone who can look at a situation and can imagine what it could look like rather than what's there . . . people with a commitment about them, who are steadfast, because it's in being steadfast and having a sense of commitment and values that puts you in there for the long haul." But it takes participation in an organization that has the capacity to enable a leader to fulfill her imagination, see it to fruition. The theme of moving from powerlessness to the power to change what was an intolerable situation (living in inadequate housing) and living the Exodus myth, freedom from slavery, full of metaphors and symbols, propelled her to move into public leadership to negotiate with landowners, builders, bankers, and the city to build a new subdivision where new drainage sewers were built.

## CLAY AND CHRIS IN THE MIDWEST

The third story is from an organizer, called Clay, from the Midwest states. He says what is observed is a new kind of self-expression as people have transformed. "It's a kind of confidence and knowledge that we can express ourselves whether that's artistically or politically or as nurturers or whatever it is." He tells a story of a woman, Chris, who is very competent, has worked in a bank for years but is never acknowledged for the huge amount of work she does for her "male bosses." He notices in an action that she is doing a lot of behind-the-scenes organizing. He tells Chris's story of development as an illustration that the self moves into the public arena primarily through "the capacity to be angry, to express anger."

At one of my individual meetings with her I just asked her why there wasn't a more public manifestation of her presence in the [community] organization? Why was it that I'd been so involved in this and another leader had to kind of point out to me that she was making all these contacts. She didn't have much to say to me; she didn't know what to say. . . . I sensed in her just a real depth of emotion and a reservoir kind of energy. . . . Well I just made a deal with her. I said, "[Chris], I would like to see you become a public person. I think there's some real talent here. Do you want to do it?" "Yes," she said. She thought about it and I said, "Okay you're on" and she ran meetings and negotiated with public officials and she collapsed . . . because she was incapable at that point in her life of being angry, or taking on somebody else. [Her personality] was respectful but . . . not blunt or direct or willing to bear the tension. So I pointed that out to her and then we made a project of her learning how to do that.

Well, there were a whole series of small steps to it. I mean initially I had her working with that in a small research action. Taking on a guy, being the person that was going to pin this 15 person low level research type of action, but she did it. She was kind of tentative, doing okay, wasn't great at it, ya know. And about another 3-4 months down the road she was going into a meeting with the U.S. Attorney, who had screwed the organization on this issue. And so I really sat down with her and I said "Listen, this is your shot." I asked "[Chris], are you ready to really express [anger]?" She told me she was and then she started to cry . . . which, in my experience, means that there's a potential revelation of the fact that they're really angry and they don't know how to deal with it. So then we role played it. I said "I want you in this meeting to just kick this guy's ass. I mean really go in there and just be as blunt and direct. You have every right in the organization to act this way, to just stop this meeting cold. And if he walks out, because he's used to getting his way, ya know, he's done his own strategy, but think of all the work you've done."

I didn't go to the meeting, but there was a team of leaders that did and she went in and she did it and I mean it was just a turning point for her in her life. We debriefed, with the other leaders who said she went in there and just stopped this guy cold. She said basically "cut the crap, you screwed us with what you did. Don't sit here and talk to us and don't mean what you're saying because [we know] what you're doing."

From then on Chris began to be a different person. She was more able to do that kind of thing in her individual meetings. . . . In and around that time she

played a major role in an action that the organization had where she pinned the Governor in front of 2000 people . . . so the Governor gets up and he's supposed to make a commitment to put a whole bunch of money into this youth strategy. He gets up, he gives his speech; he talks all around it. He's kind of a keynote speaker . . . I told Chris when he's done you have written out right here these words, did he say these words? Did he say these words and make a commitment to put his staff to work with the [organizational] leadership, to develop this strategy? And he didn't do it. He talked about how good it would be, the need for it, the credentials of the organization, all of the work they had done. So he finished and he starts to turn away from the podium and she said, "Excuse me Governor," and the hall just got quiet. This was the moment, right? Ya know, is the [organization] going to be this rude aggressive group or is it going to pull this off? And she was masterful. She was direct, she was blunt, and she was a little bit angry, but in a controlled way and she said, "Excuse me, Governor, you have not made a commitment to ya know. Are you saying that your staff is going to work with the [organizational] leadership and you're going to put these funds in?" And he, and he, again everyone was silent and he said "yes." And then the place went up for grabs. And I mean she wouldn't have done that, that was a dramatic change for that woman over a period of a year and a half, two years.

That is an example of integrated, "cool" anger as opposed to just a "crying kind of anger" or "exploding." But she never did [explode]; that was her problem. . . . I wished she had done that with the [attorney general] . . . she'd nail him, he'd nail her back and she'd jump up and say [explicative] . . . and she'd learn afterwards that she didn't die and he didn't die . . . and life goes on. But she was tough, she held her ground, she was blunt with him, she told him how angry she was, enough to kind of begin to get that out and to recognize that she could experience that and it would not consume her.

I asked this organizer if she looked any different now. He said essentially that she looks like she's a more confident person. I think she has a greater sense of presence when she walks into a group of people . . . you just have the sense that there's someone else here. She's not as invisible but she can revert to that. I've seen her do it . . . she learned to be invisible as a kid. She was one of eleven kids on a farm and there were all kinds of problems and it was in her interest then to be safe, to be invisible . . . so she learned that behavior and it helped her at the time; it was useful . . . we're all that way around a whole range of emotional experiences that are learned.

Clay described what the other organizers in this research reported; being

in public life is about wearing a mask and the appropriate expression of yourself that's done in a way that's controlled. . . . If you can't do that, then you can have these inappropriate expressions of these emotions, which are there whether you want them or not. I mean that's not something we choose [rationally]. . . . You have to play a role in public life, that's the nature of it . . . a series of choices which actually become conditioned over time. . . . And when there's a lack of integration and there's these kinds of rages or experiences of grief or victimization, they take us over. And you can't do it [i.e., act].

Clay understood his own journey to include the same social processes that Chris had to experience, that is, to “overcome the fear that I had and to be able to express anger.” He understands that he has to work on this himself if he is to ask others to work on their own fears and anger. One cannot integrate the emotions of “fear, anger, hope” unless there is an opportunity to test it out in action. Clay states action is “activity that is aimed, proposed, conceptualized and rationalized to fulfill that response. So that we live, because we’re so fearful of experiencing those parts of ourselves . . . we’re told by society that we can’t, we’re not supposed to [express anger, emotion publicly]. So we’ve got to create situations that just drag it out of people.” For this organizer, transformation is “inherently a social term . . . you can’t talk about transformation without people to observe it. . . . It means a change in the quality of expression of somebody . . . and it’s a change in perception.”

### The Dialogue on the Nature of Transformation in Social Learning

It is tempting to focus on the context: a description of the phenomenon of the large broad-based organization itself. There are few contexts of communicative action committed to the reclaiming of the lifeworld against the imperatives of the economic system (steered by money) and the state/market administrative apparatus (steered by power), available today for critical literacy, critical thinking, social critique, and social action. Life experiences, life histories, and indigenous knowledge are able to flourish within the various meetings, study groups, and relationships developed in broad-based organizations. New identities can be forged through leadership development, and community projects bring about substantial social change in cities, all attractive concrete “outcomes” of broad-based organizing. Another argument attracts us to study these large groups; substantial erosion of the social fabric in cities today (networks and relationships, social capital) endangers democracy (Barber, 1998; Putnam, 2000). A dense set of voluntary organizations in a community is essential for democratic debate and formation. That citizens indicate they need a vehicle, a broad-based organization, to practice democracy and develop that social fabric is a tribute to pioneers and visionaries and an indictment of neo-liberal governments who seek to destroy them. However, our task in this article is to engage in dialogue on transformative learning theory as the corpus has developed to date, to broaden and deepen it.

The social construction of transformation coemerges in the learner and the setting, that is, the personal and the social in dialectical relationship transform. Social construction recognizes a reality within the collective (problems across families) and a reality of power structures “out there” that constrain families and an adequate quality of life. It also is interested in constructing new structures “out there” and constructing new identities, images, and stories within the individual as well as the collective. This requires imagination, visioning, and, above all, critical dialogue. Critique is not focused on the resistance to social problems, such as

antiwar or the policies of the World Trade Organization (WTO), but rather on the struggles to understand the social pressures on families and how ideological shifts in democracy (neoliberalism, specifically), have constrained social and personal developmental processes in families and cities. It is different from individual constructivism that recognizes that the internal construction of reality is the only reality. The social construction of transformation reconstructs or reorganizes what presently exists, both the external social structures and the internal personal structures within persons, for the purpose of promoting imagination and the power to change these structures.

In this research, the starting point includes the excavation of family histories and how ancestors constructed meaning in a particular kind of cultural and historical milieu (Bradt, 1997). Then, the focus shifts to how the world shapes the individual and group. Invisible hegemonic assumptions and worldviews (Brookfield, 2000), the creation of societal norms, and the privileging of certain kinds of knowledge become the topic for conversation. Welton (1995) calls for a social learning paradigm informed by Habermas's notion of the lifeworld defined as the interactions of every place in social life that includes communicative practice and is the medium through which culture, society, and person get reproduced. "The lifeworld is the realm of intersubjective interaction and adult learning par excellence, and instructions from the system can generate pathologies by violating the normative processes governing life and action in the lifeworld itself" (p. 142). Thus, it is the structures of society that enable or constrain individuals from developing as human beings to become actualized and individuated, a transformative process (Dirkx, 2000b). The assumption is that the body politic is set up to be benevolent, organized into social structures to maintain social stability. It should include diverse groups in decision making and be dynamic in its willingness to change. What is learned is that this notion is ideal, even utopian, and that democracy is fraught with bureaucratic structures that are static and run by powerful people, usually not diverse citizens. De Tocqueville in the early 19th century concluded that the success of democracy is founded on a dense set of organizations that provide forums for diverse groups of citizens to debate issues and decisions. Democracy requires critical reflection in a body politic on a broad scale to discourage the colonization of the lifeworld by the market (money) and the state (power), and to develop citizenship. The type of interaction among actors and groups in a city forms the possibility for social reconstruction that leads to transformation of persons and larger social structures.

Paulo Freire, David Kolb, and Jack Mezirow have emphasized experiential learning and the importance of critical reflection, but with little systematic attention to context. Freire does a better job of coalescing the person and the environment to form a context than the other two theorists. Paulo Freire contributes the notion that group and individual development occur through stages of consciousness with dialogue as the social venue for shifts in thinking and production of consciousness; it is Mezirow and associates who have sought to understand the cognitive structures that transform in this process. Whereas Freire understands his stages of development as coemergent, both individuals and the social context

transform together, Mezirow views change in ways of knowing or reality as an individual endeavor. The consequences of an individual cognitive structural perspective/habit of mind transformation do change relationships with others, relationships to knowledge, self-concept, and, above all, change in behavior. But in social construction, the relationship between the social and the individual is viewed holistically. It is possible to view specific individual experience separate from social interaction, and certainly individuals make sense of their experience within the parameters of their own meaning perspectives. But the sense that the group makes of the action in the political public arena is what is the intention; how individuals reconcile that action is certainly a challenge to their schemas. This makes the enterprise of research and writing more complex in relation to the already complex notion of transformation.

As we have seen, transformation is not mere change; there must, as Kegan (2000) asserts, be a change in form, a change in structure. Kegan expands Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to include constructivism and calls it a change in epistemology. Movement toward the stage of self-authorship in students in higher education is a way out of being embedded in assimilative, social behavior. Self-authorship is a stage that potential leaders experience as well while in service to the collective. However, there is a different orientation to social construction that is founded on social purposes, not individual aims. Constructivism requires that there be a reconfiguration of the subject-object relationship. Critical reflection of what one believes and values begins with recognition that one's thoughts have been uncritically assimilated (are subjective), collected from the social milieu around one (Mezirow, 2000). In communicative social action settings dialogue revolves around issues and how players, as representatives of their member institutions, have constructed a stand on the issue at hand. This stand is hammered out within institutional member groups of the broad-based organization. To reconstruct a set of beliefs and values that are foundational to issues, groups have to critically examine them, test them in participative action, and evaluate them after actions. They must be laid out on the table, so to speak, for all to peruse and decide if they are worth keeping. Thus, the ideas, perspectives, values, and beliefs become objects. There is a transition from a social influence external to the individuals to a social influence internal to the individuals. This is an individual endeavor in constructivist theory, but a social learning process includes a group analysis and critique of how these beliefs and values are derived historically, economically, and politically.

### The Subject-Object Relationship in the Social Construction of Transformation

Freire's (1970) notion of consciousness develops as the social and historical begin to dawn on a group's intentions to identify the subject-object relationship. Not only is there objectification of the self and the other (person or groups), but also objectification and relationships built between past and present life experi-

ences in one's own personal narrative. Economic systems can eventually become the object for dialogue in political consciousness. So, self-authorship takes on a social dimension when one is connected to his or her own story characters. This is seen in Bob's victimization that had plagued him for years. He was dead inside, with no life energy around his small abused child. He was literally unable to relate to this aspect of himself until another, the Haitian, reopened and challenged that relationship. Then the small child within became a part of his conscious context (not just prelinguistic subjectivity) and he was able to coemerge with the child in a relationship that was vibrant. The space around this relationship was enlarged, full of new possibilities and compassion.

Naïve consciousness in Freire's stage theory represents a "language" or form that is subject-to-subject or undifferentiated. Movement out of naivete is a complex process but quite necessary and inevitable in IAF groups. As this research shows, however, there is a prelinguist stage that seems to occur that requires no language or words as in literacy but rather images steeped in emotions derived from past experiences in the lifeworlds of ancestors as well as present participants; these usually derive from childhood. Metaphors and images in stories also represent prelinguistic material. Whether this is a prior stage to naivete or part of naivete depends on the definition of naivete. In naïve consciousness, there is little awareness of inward psychological or spiritual knowledge of one's inner self. Without words to abstract meaning, the state or activity characterized by sensation, emotion, volition, or thought is arrested. One feels oppressed or depressed, but because everyone in the context around themselves is also this way, it becomes an accepted way of life. One knows and feels something but it cannot be articulated. Both subject-to-subject and prelinguistic forms in initial naïve consciousness are undifferentiated and highly subjective. Bob, for instance, a veteran organizer of 15 to 20 years at the time, who one would not call naïve politically or socially, harbored prelinguistic images of victimhood that constellated around his small abused child, a mish-mash of subjectivity and undifferentiated emotions. Thus, one can be skilled at words, even be politically conscious of the forces that keep people from being fully human, but be vulnerable from unintegrated emotional content. Ego, strength, and readiness (age, attention) are key factors in confronting these kinds of emotional demons.

Transitive consciousness, Freire's second stage, could be viewed as depth or descent into the dark night of the soul (Dirkx, 2000a; Jung, 1954). As group members in core leadership teams and institutes of learning begin to pull out the pain, pressures, and problems of ancestors in family stories and present lives, people begin the process of despair, sadness, regression, lifting out the repressed, grieving over the loss of the familiar (as painful as it is), and finally objectifying it in groups. As Clay says, "We have to create situations that just drag it out of people." Without confronting victimization, experiences of grief, or rage, people cannot play public roles; the public role requires that one cannot have "inappropriate expressions of emotions, which are there whether you want them or not," as Clay explains. It is the stage that is the messiest, the most difficult, at the level of bringing the images to word. Critical consciousness, the third stage, is the differentia-



tion that I think most represents what Mezirow is explicating for us. This is a cognitive function of differentiation, found in the egoic structure of the psyche, and represents a letting go of what is not important in personality, separating from it, negating it, and then integrating, consolidating, and preserving emotional and cognitive material (perspectives) that are important to keep. Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1985) would call this a higher function as it relates to thinking; for this research, the higher mental functions of memory, attention, perception, and thinking all are addressed through participative action. In this research, the transformative process is socially constructed from historical lifeworlds (understanding family problems in context, economic and social conditions, for at least three to five generations back); it is critical (i.e., understanding that from World War II to the present the way out of economic difficulties was to consume), and it is relational. Because of the educator organizers' grounding in spirituality and soul-work, and because community relationships are nurtured for this personal work, the organizers and other leaders become the agitators that disturb to the deepest structures of the unconscious.

In the later stages of conscientization, Freire (1970) exchanged the subject-object relationship to one of subject-subject relationship, a relationship between the individual-in-context and the world, the social structures, and their political components. For instance, Opal's leader was able to look across systems and institutions as she negotiated with bankers, architects, and city departments to build something new where nothing existed before. Shifts through personal prelinguistic images (abused child, a slave to the system, or as angry invisible players) become mediators to relationships with the world as the historical evolution of social influences in that world are "seen." What the world systems (economic, historical, and social) have done to individuals becomes a subject for dialogue and action. For example, the dialectical negation of Chris coming to eliminate her behind-the-scenes behavior (what Vygotsky [Wertsch, 1985] would call noncommunicative behavior, where Chris "indicates" that she wants something) becomes the focus for what the world has laid on her in her family of origin. The organizer recognized her prelinguistic language, movement toward organizing that precedes movement toward working on the organizational level, indicating her talent for organizing, but she did not recognize the sign. Clay's relationship with her becomes the mediator (and the container) that gives her the participative action language (both the words and the action experience) from which she could integrate previous assumptions, beliefs, and actions. In time, she takes voluntary control for this internalization, does this herself, but for the interim, it requires a mediator, a relationship/container, to sustain the learning. Vygotsky maintained that changes in the internal structures of individuals appear initially in an external form because they are social processes. There is an inherent relationship between external and internal activity, "but it is a genetic relationship" in which the major exposure is to "mature cultural forms of behavior" (Wertsch, 1985, p. 63). Transformation of social phenomena into psychological functions changes the process, the structures, and the functions in the individual

and society. Vygotsky saw internalizing social reality as playing a primary role in determining the nature of internal intrapsychological functioning.

Because my thesis in this article is that transformation is linked with the social construction of knowledge (self, social, and body knowledge) through the mediation of dyadic and group relationships in a context of social action, disequilibrium and the appearance of new sensations and perceptions presented in participative action seem to be necessary conditions for transformation. By this I mean that social action disrupts, bothers, and interferes with the established internal structures of the psyche as well as external structures in the world, and it is this constant state of disequilibrium that supports transformation. As participants begin to "see a different way," as one organizer put it, individuals are able to internalize new external experiences that expand perceptions in consciousness. "Consciousness is often too small to accommodate both an engagement in an activity and awareness of one's self or one's action. In fact, it is often reported that exemplary performances and profound engagements correspond to 'forgetting' of self" (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2000, p. 7). The possibility of breaking habits of perceptions is possible when groups help leaders focus their consciousness on their performance and the consequences of it. As described earlier, perceptions are less cognitive than perspectives, which expands the notion of transformation to consider sensation and unconscious material that is experienced but not registered. Perceptions are gathered in rich cultural environments like social action, and only a few of those perceptions can enter awareness (fewer than are actually experienced as sensations) as dialogue and attention focus on the historical and social reasons that cause families and other structures in society to act in aberrant ways. These aberrations are often hushed, unspoken secrets in the lives of many. But when they are made public, the internal relationship between the sociohistorical story in a particular time and the psychic structures in the present seems to change, that is, become integrated and emotional control by the images is diffused as the images, reasons, or happenings become objectified.

In summary of this section, repressed material from childhood or schooling can be brought to light, to word, through trusted relationships and action in the public arena. Forums such as IAF study/research groups and large actions give people the opportunity to experience the rational perspectives in cognition and the unconscious emotional material in psychic structures and to build relationships between the two. What is key to these stories is the interplay of the social and the personal. As Chris engaged with representatives of the legal system and the state system (the governor), not only was she transformed as her anger was integrated and controlled but her relationship with her frightened/silenced child was renewed, challenged, and altered. Others in the collective also gained power and growing confidence to try the leadership role themselves. And the governor and the attorney general changed, too, as part of the context. The social structures were changed; to what extent they transformed depends on the change in form of the governor's office structure or the attorney general's administrative structure.

The social construction of perceptions works from the premise that knowing and knowledge are not just concepts and ideas but rather include a vast array of

contextual material that is unformulated and enacted in every moment of our existence. Social construction nested in the body politic gives opportunities to act on this unformulated material, what we know but have not expressed. For IAF groups, the nurturance of one-on-one relationships ferrets out what people know (interests, stories, beliefs, values) in their personal unconscious and in time places people in collectivities and social action that penetrate them at even the deeper collective unconscious level where they are unaware of collective material that is highly powerful and controlling. Agitation in this area is extremely disorienting, which is why a social group as a container is essential for the depth of this kind of transformation.

### Transformative Social Construction Processes

This research with IAF groups is a process that I call participative action in the social construction of transformation. Constructivism is primarily concerned with a change in cognitive structures as a person “reforms their meaning-formation” (Kegan, 2000). What is seen in this research is a reformation that is not necessarily a personal phenomena but rather a process that is decidedly social. The social construction of transformation as groups come into relationship with power, internally and externally, in building a new power organization/structure in society includes five processes: disequilibrium, internalization, relationships, imagination, and changes in consciousness.

I have tried to show that transformation includes structural changes in the psyches of persons and in the structures of society. These structural changes are easier to see in social action than in a classroom because the context is so volatile; it involves disequilibrium at all structural levels of personal and social consciousness. Mezirow and others confirm that a disorienting event is the trigger that starts the process of transformation. In the case of social action, disequilibria is present in all relationships, dyads, small and large groups; thus, it is more pervasive and constant in participative action.

A change of consciousness occurs with a collective movement from subject-to-subject naïve consciousness to subject-to-object (where the person is in control of the object, such as anger in this research), and finally subject-to-world consciousness in critical and ultimately political consciousness. Higher mental functions of frames of reference, perspectives, memory, attention, perceptions, and thinking are the organizational properties of the functional unity of consciousness. The concern is with the agitation of a dynamic organization of consciousness, seen holistically, rather than as elements. This organization is reconstructed in its entirety and includes not only the mind but body consciousness. *Consciousness* is an epiphenomenon, a consequence of reflection and action. The transformation involves a change in the interrelationship among the higher mental functions, particularly a change in form of perceptions that include a conceptual mind, as well as sensations that create a world through ideas, concepts, im-

ages, and more bodily ancient archetypes constellated as emotions. The social and the personal transformation (change in structures) coemerge at the same time.

The transition from social influences external to the individuals, which in social action always involves conflict, to the internalization of social influences can be a painful process. As personal life history is excavated in a social context, it is possible to objectify deep-seated emotional material, such as victimization and states of slavery that once controlled us but now can be integrated. This kind of work, an accessing and reimagining of the abused child and the child in enslaving ghettos from the psychic structure of the collective unconscious, mediated by storytelling, is essential for leadership development in social action. Without it, one cannot sustain participation in social action.

Although a change in structures of consciousness and the change dynamic of disequilibrium are shown to occur in participative action, there is another process, the formation of relationships in dyads and groups, which mediates and becomes the containers for the internationalization of external experiences. Personal and collective stories of family history mediate the transference from the past to future action as rational sociohistorical reasons are made known and personal stories in the present are attached to those reasons. There is movement out of personal hurts, into collective hurts, as similarities are seen and personal issues in family histories are disclosed. Several of the organizers mentioned that this revelation of similarities among stories is a process they called hope. It is a dynamic that seems to mediate and diffuse constraining images of victimization and slavery, and attachment to those images. Indications that people are ready to move into leadership roles include group work on the constraints that limit personal growth, and imagination to visualize an alternative situation. When these are seen, there is a potential for leadership. Relationships to power and others as objects, require cognitive and emotional differentiation internalization processes.

## Summary

Paulo Freire's theory of conscientization, stages of consciousness development, is a framework to explicate the complex social interactions and subsequent internalizations that occur in social action. The technique used to engage citizens and their imaginations is storytelling in the building of community in a citywide BBO. It is used as a strategy for developing systematic social capital in a social action context. However, it is foundational to the purpose of a BBO that people learn about themselves within the contexts of their own personal stories as they develop from isolated monads into public players. Central themes in family stories and Biblical narratives, coupled with experiences in participative action with power in the public arena, seem to agitate adults and provide necessary disequilibrium fundamental to ontological shifts in being. What transforms from a personal perspective in this research, finally, are perceptions originated from expectations and past experiences, located in something deeper than the cognitive ego, and more organically dynamic and emotional. This particular orientation comes

from psychodynamic and social theory that assumes that the quality of relationships to others represents what is known, what is barely known, and what is not known but deeply present, the nonrational. Certainly habits of mind and perspectives (rational cognitive worldviews) are changed, but these are the surface structures of the psyche. The social construction of transformation coemerges in the learner and the setting, that is, the personal and the social in dialectical relationship transform.

Transformation is linked with relationships and participative action as leaders learn and practice the art of leadership in a democracy. The building of community power (a BBO) to balance an otherwise pervasive system of neoliberalism has the capacity to transform personal structures within individuals and social structures in society. It is the hope for democracy that these BBOs become more prevalent as they strengthen mediating institutions that historically have protected the family, they give opportunities to practice civility and leadership in civil society, and they foster both personal and social transformation as adults participate in citizenship education.

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