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Embracing Complexity: A Reflective investigation of Cultural Transformation Through Experiential Learning

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Abstract

Educational settings are microcosms of the communities and the societies in which they exist, where educators play a role in preparing young people for activity in the public sphere. Educational settings are not removed from the arenas of power relationships. Social reproduction theorists have demonstrated how unchallenged preconceived notions are inadvertently reinforced and reproduced in schools, which in some cases reinforce stratification and the dominance of the powerful interests prevalent in the surrounding society. This action-oriented conceptual study is an examination of the dynamic complexity of cultural transmission and transformation. It is an investigation of the assumption that human agency can influence the direction of the inevitable process of change. The three parts reflect the three components of a complex theory of experiential learning and cultural transformation. They are: (A) an explanation of the operating mechanism of cultural transmission and social reproduction; (B) speculation regarding a deeper understanding of the cultural context of transformation, including the possible effects of a targeted intervention; and (C) an operational framework for an action project. Participation in the transmission process with a heightened awareness of its intricacies and a purposeful commitment to a conception of a desired outcome can enhance the ability of an individual or an educational framework to promote change. This study brings together elements of theoretical inquiry, cultural context and practical application in an experiential learning community. A theory of cultural transformation and an approach to reflective practice are discussed. A review of a five-year project I designed and facilitated in collaboration with educators who participated in an in-service professional development program illustrates the applicability and the efficacy of the approach.

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EMBRACING COMPLEXITY:
A REFLECTIVE INVESTIGATION OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Joshua Yarden

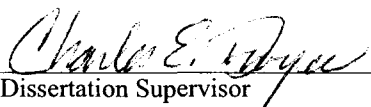
A DISSERTATION

in

Education

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2008


Dissertation Supervisor


Graduate Group Chairperson

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Joshua David Yarden

2008

לנעמה,

יובל, שגב ודודן

I am one of five.

This is for

Dotan, who hears what many do not hear and says what many are afraid to say; for

Segev, an upstanding character with sublime expectations; for

Yuval, a flowing stream of creative energy; for

Na'ama, who has brought pleasure to my life

and with whom I will continue to discover the unknown.

Our commitment to lifelong learning

is the staff we raise to show our children an ethical way.

May the completion of this endeavor inspire you to commit yourselves

to see your dreams become realities as you engage your potential to become.

Acknowledgements

I thank Professor Charles Dwyer for his patient guidance. The wisdom of his light touch assisted me in sharpening my focus. He challenged me to see the weak points of the structure of this project as it developed. Whatever clarity I have achieved in this dissertation came about after a long process of reorganizing complex explanations and rewriting complicated passages. I have yet to exhaust the value of his input, which will continue to inform my practical and scholarly application of this conceptual project.

The operative section of this investigation is in large part a reflection of my long collaboration with Rabbi Bradley Solmsen, the director of Brandeis University's Genesis Program. His willingness to explore innovative ideas in a laboratory environment enabled me to engage in this endeavor. His focus on achieving objectives challenged me to stay grounded in the needs of our colleagues and the interests of the adolescent participants of Genesis '02, '03, '04, '05 & '06 who presented us with fascinating learning opportunities.

The community educators and the course instructors with whom I collaborated over the years at Genesis are too numerous to list here, but I owe each of them a great deal of gratitude. I hope to be able to work with many of them again in the future. Those relationships impacted much of my work at Genesis, contributed significantly to the creation of this project and continue to influence my experimentation and implementation in framing and creating transformational learning spaces.

In Memory

I began writing about freedom, liberty, democratic action and the relationship between theory and practice in the courses I took with Peter Bachrach at Temple University, in 1979 and 1980. These ideas have long occupied my thoughts and informed my life, and they are central to this project. He was an intellectually challenging and highly engaging teacher who provided an important personal example to me during those two semesters. He believed in my ability and encouraged me to strive for excellence. Professor Bachrach's obituary appeared in the newspaper nearly three decades later, on the day that I defended this dissertation. May the sincerity of his commitments and the quality of his contributions to scholarship and to society continue to be a guiding light for those who remember him and for many others who still have the opportunity to read his work and to study with his students.

ABSTRACT

EMBRACING COMPLEXITY: A REFLECTIVE INVESTIGATION OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Joshua Yarden

Supervisor: Dr. Charles Dwyer

Educational settings are microcosms of the communities and the societies in which they exist, where educators play a role in preparing young people for activity in the public sphere. Educational settings are not removed from the arenas of power relationships. Social reproduction theorists have demonstrated how unchallenged preconceived notions are inadvertently reenforced and reproduced in schools, which in some cases reinforce stratification and the dominance of the powerful interests prevalent in the surrounding society. This action-oriented conceptual study is an examination of the dynamic complexity of cultural transmission and transformation. It is an investigation of the assumption that human agency can influence the direction of the inevitable process of change. The three parts reflect the three components of a complex theory of experiential learning and cultural transformation. They are: A) an explanation of the operating mechanism of cultural transmission and social reproduction; B) speculation regarding a deeper understanding of the

cultural context of transformation, including the possible effects of a targeted intervention; and C) an operational framework for an action project. Participation in the transmission process with a heightened awareness of its intricacies and a purposeful commitment to a conception of a desired outcome can enhance the ability of an individual or an educational framework to promote change. This study brings together elements of theoretical inquiry, cultural context and practical application in an experiential learning community. A theory of cultural transformation and an approach to reflective practice are discussed. A review of a five-year project I designed and facilitated in collaboration with educators who participated in an in-service professional development program illustrates the applicability and the efficacy of the approach.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Part I: The Issue Under Investigation	
Introduction to Part I	15
1.1) The Inevitability and Variability of Social Reproduction	17
1.2) Power, Repression and Emancipation	22
1.3) The Tree of Knowledge: What does it Mean to Know?	29
Conclusion of Part I	60
Part II: Toward a Cultural Context for Emancipatory Education	
Introduction to Part II	63
2.1) Culture as a Dialectical Process	66
2.2) Pedagogy of the Privileged	73
2.3) The Transformation of Culture	78
Conclusion of Part II	113
Part III: Reflective Practice in Experiential Learning	
Introduction to Part III	114
3.1) Community Education at Genesis	120
3.2) Elements of the Complex Reflective Practice Process	140
3.3) Complex Reflective Practice in Operation	159

Conclusion of Part III	170
Conclusion	175
Appendices	
Appendix A: Genesis Senior Educator Job Description	179
Appendix B: The Community Educator (CE) Position at Genesis	181
Appendix C: The Culminating Project at Genesis	183
Appendix D: Participant Explorations at Genesis	186
Appendix E: Generative Modeling	194
Appendix F: Peer Observation and Reflective Feedback	196
Bibliography	200

List of Illustrations

Diagram 1: A Complex Theory	9
Diagram 2: An Action Theory of Change Agency	13
Diagram 2, Part I: Explanation	17
Diagram 3: Tree of Knowledge	52
Diagram 2, Part II: Speculation	66
Diagram 2, Part III: Operation	120
Diagram 4: Five Reflective Lenses	154
Diagram 5: Closed Circuit Learning	155
Diagram 6: Open Source Learning	156
Diagram 7: Five Approaches to Encountering Diversity	157
Diagram 8: Encountering Diversity	158

Preface

This conceptual dissertation is an investigation of the transmission and transformation of culture, the occurrence of which I understand to be inevitable, but not predetermined. It grew out of two research projects conducted simultaneously, during the Winter and Spring of 2002. One was an analysis of cultural transmission and social change, which I later published as an article entitled, “Emancipatory Education and Religious Tradition.” (Yarden, 2004) The other was an empirical case study of the nature and the practice of what is commonly known as ‘informal education.’ I had been interested and active in each area and in the convergence of the two for many years.

I began the case study with several ideas about the nature and the quality of informal educational experiences, but without one single clearly defined topic or goal in mind. I observed that in both my experience and in the interviews I conducted for the case study, much of the loosely defined, if not ill-defined area known as ‘informal education’ concerns the development of relationships and the transmission of values. I was quickly drawn to attempting an analysis of informal education with the intention of considering how I could apply my theoretical work to a practical setting in order to promote a culture of social justice. It was through the research process that I came to understand that the tendency of many educators to perceive dichotomous relationships between between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ education and between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ were unhelpful, if not deleterious to gaining an understanding of the essential nature of education.

After completing the case study, I was employed as a professional development consultant for Genesis, Brandeis University's residential summer program for high school students, which had been the subject of my empirical research project. I was charged with the responsibility of leading a process to clearly define the goals of the program and to prepare the staff members to effectively achieve those goals. My role there evolved into the position of Senior Educator, and my association with the program lasted for five years. My responsibilities included working with the director to conceptualize the program, collaborating on the design and facilitation of the seven to ten day staff orientation each year, collaborating over the course of my tenure there with twenty faculty members on the development and implementation of project and problem-based courses, and facilitating an in-service professional development program in reflective practice, which I designed for a team of approximately ten community educators and interns each summer.

The direction of this investigation emerged over time as I defined my goals as an educator and as a researcher. I primarily saw the tension between the two roles during the initial stage, but I set out with an awareness of the potential conflict of interests, looking to fashion an approach that would bring research and application together as mutually enhancing endeavours. I came to define my role from the dual perspective of education researcher and research educator, embracing the opportunity for each element of the role to inform the other. As an educator, I was coming to my task with the perspective of a researcher concerned not only with the particular activity I was planning or implementing, but also with understanding the essential nature of what was happening in the setting. The

research perspective I brought to my educational tasks enabled me to focus more carefully on the nature and the efficacy of our educational work. My perspective as an educator and an insider to the project kept my research focused on how to better define and achieve the educational objectives of the program. I might otherwise have lost sight of those goals, concentrating instead on a separate research agenda. In short, the roles were mutually enhancing, and I found myself intently focused on balancing them appropriately to ensure that neither exerted undue influence over the other.

Complex Reflective Practice (CRP) is the approach to experiential learning I designed in an ongoing practice-based collaboration with my colleagues at Genesis. I facilitated and reiterated the in-service program over a period of five years, between 2002 and 2006. The interest and appreciation of many of the educators were early indicators of success. Working together as a group we were able to identify, qualify and take steps to manage programmatic challenges as well as difficult relations among staff members, with adolescent participants and to act more effectively as mediators between the participants themselves. Even so, the approach was received with some skepticism and resistance. It was not always possible to demonstrate a correlation between preparation and success. In some cases, it even appeared to be the case that our preparation as a staff may have detracted from addressing the needs of the participants.

I was continually challenged each year, as new issues presented themselves when we implemented solutions to the problems we identified. CRP became increasingly integrated into the work of the educators from year to year. I applied the lessons learned through

experience and became more effective in my work with the educators each summer. Over the period of nearly five years, Complex Reflective Practice evolved to the point of becoming the operating system of a collaborative approach to experiential education in an intentional learning community.

The three main parts of this investigation comprise an action theory of experiential learning and change agency. Part I presents an explanation of the problem associated with the negative aspects of the phenomenon of social reproduction. Part II focuses on the cultural context of social change and proposes an interpretation of cultural transmission that supports emancipatory thinking. Part III is a report on an intervention designed to promote reflective learning and change agency, which was implemented in an educational setting. Although the sections are presented sequentially, the explanation of the problem, speculation regarding the possibility of change and the operational intervention were developed together over a period of five years, from 2002 to 2006.

Introduction

The Field of This Investigation

Beyond teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, education has the broader mission of preparing people for a lifetime of learning and participating in society. The behavior of educators and the culture of schools and other educational settings inevitably contribute in various ways to the formation of evolving societies. They contribute to the creation of the society of tomorrow, help to prepare the workforce and the pool of voters who will choose the next generation of leaders. They also influence the followers, the rule-breakers, the innovators, and the next generation of teachers. Whatever a child learns in school and beyond promotes or suppresses the development of the characteristics that define how people participate in groups, and to what extent independent and critical thinking skills are valued and cultivated.

It is through this ongoing series of interactions with others in their immediate communities that children learn what it means to be a citizen and how to interact in society. This learning happens in the most pronounced as well as in the most subtle ways. The imperceptible aspects of culture and learning may be even more influential than those which are formally defined as educational goals, since they are more likely to go unscrutinized and unchallenged, even though they are effectively passed on from generation to generation.

Educational settings are venues of socialization and enculturation. Their underlying values project implicit, if not explicit conceptions of justice and social responsibility.

Regardless of whether a given educational system functions by nurturing the potential of individual expression, by cultivating a community of mutually supportive members or through insidious political oppression, many aspects of teaching serve to model a pattern for how problems are to be defined and solved, and how a responsible person ought to interact with others in a desired social order. This includes everything from pointing out the difference between right and wrong and the virtues of honesty, sharing and friendship, to dealing with bullying and violence; from civil commemorations and holiday celebrations to religious rituals and liturgy; from leadership and honor codes to testing, grading, tracking and much more.

The evolving culture of a society is reflected in the manner in which values are prioritized and learned in families, communities and in schools, which promote and reflect both individual achievement and the development of that society. Liberal democracies, for instance, promote the idea that education enables children to progress through a passageway of opportunity in school, which prepares all students to realize their potential in adulthood. Research, however, has revealed that schools, like other social institutions, also reinforce the very influences which further entrench preconceived notions, including assumptions about equity and difference in society.¹ This apparent paradox suggests that the conceptual underpinning of equity² in education is poorly conceived and possibly based upon

1 A detailed discussion of social reproduction theory is included in Part I.

2 Equity, as I employ the term here, is meant to indicate the guiding principle of balancing conflicting interests or the contradictory desires and needs of individuals and/or groups, given a limited supply of resources. Equity is a process, rather than a definitive equation. It is different from mechanical equality, in the sense of sameness or mathematically equal distribution. It is a matter of seeking a just balance

unfounded assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning.

Children in the United States are taught each morning in schools that their society is constituted upon the values of 'liberty and justice for all' as they recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. These are among the cherished espoused values of the nation. Children in public schools which serve communities of lower socio-economic status, however, are more likely to have less qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2004), lack necessary materials (Oakes & Saunders, 2004) and study in overcrowded buildings (Ready, Lee & Welner 2004) than are children in communities with higher average standards of living. To the extent which this is the case, the espoused values have been supplanted by a contrary organizing principle for public education and for all that is affected by it. In practice, while education is mandated through federal and state government, schools are funded primarily through local property taxes collected by municipalities. Wealthy communities fund schools for the children of their residents, while communities with narrower tax bases fund schools for the children of their residents, thereby ensuring a higher per-pupil monetary investment in education for the children of the financially privileged public. The values of American society, as practiced, demonstrate that the concrete distribution of liberty and justice in education is a matter not only of collective responsibility to realize the values expressed in nationally venerated texts, but is also a measure of the limited capacity of local communities to provide education services. The state and federal

between the excesses of individual indulgence at the expense of the legitimate needs of others or the excesses of government that limit the freedom of individuals or groups in society, where the greater good may be a matter of contention.

funds allocated to ameliorate the situation indicate a recognition of the problem and a willingness to assume responsibility for addressing it, but they do not fully compensate for the disparity of funding or solve the associated problems mentioned above.

If the Pledge of Allegiance were to be edited to reflect the gulf between the expression of values and their realization in practice, children might be taught to recite that the flag, and the republic for which it stands, represent ‘a great deal of liberty and justice for some, if only a modicum of liberty and justice for others.’ That would make for a rather wordy and perhaps also unworthy pledge, unlikely to be mandated by the Congress of the United States. It seems equally unlikely that people would want their children pledging allegiance to a flag that stands for a society dedicated to absolute equality of everything for everyone without recognition of the many legitimate and desirable forms of diversity.

Declaring and pledging to maintain liberty and justice are matters of principle, but actually enabling people to exercise their liberty and defining the nature of justice are processes of ongoing trial and error in complex evolving political and legal systems. An expression such as ‘liberty and justice for all’ might be translated into the goal of achieving a broad consensus as to what would constitute a reasonably equitable distribution of, and access to wealth, knowledge and power. The realization of such a consensus would not deprive, marginalize or disenfranchise certain citizens or subordinate their needs to those of privileged others. Neither would it limit individual rights and prerogatives beyond that which is essential to protect civil rights. But what is reasonable? What is essential? And, who is to decide? A conceptual underpinning for education that is consistent with that search would

provide a positive predisposition toward grasping the complexities of human interaction, formulating coherent and verifiable analyses of social issues, and developing practical approaches to strengthening emancipatory values in learning environments and in the broader society.

This sort of learning is not limited to the realm of political theory or social policy. It can be applied to the manner in which the most basic and prevalent issues are approached and understood. The discrepancy between what people think and what people actually do can be examined in order to investigate how to more clearly define values and more effectively achieve goals.

This is not an investigation of national politics or official policy, although there are implications for both. The same approach outlined in the example on the macro level above can be applied to more subtle and nuanced aspects of teaching and learning that reinforce values in micro-educational settings. Practitioners can examine the content of their teaching, check the efficacy of their methods of achieving their objectives and hone their goals through the process of exploring and narrowing the discrepancy between espoused values and practiced values. It is a matter of defining and pursuing goals that are both worthy and achievable. Developing the tools and cultivating the ability required to grasp meaning, solve problems and turn thought into action are elements at the core of educational purpose. Learning to identify unfounded assumptions, analysing cultural traits and social patterns, and reconstituting educational practice to reflect espoused values are at the core of this investigation.

This study contributes to the further understanding of the nature and the influence of erroneous assumptions that people harbor regarding their own behavior by examining how we come to rely on such notions, and suggests an approach through which educators can engage in the purposeful transformation of culture through reflective collaboration, rather than inadvertently reproducing the very elements of inequity that they perhaps mean to address. Beyond merely speculating about possibilities, I have attempted to devise a practical approach to teaching and learning that promotes authentic cultural transformation toward an equitable vision of social responsibility, which can be implemented through the educational experience itself.

The evolution of the project led to a professional in-service intervention for reflective practice in experiential education, grounded in three component parts: 1) learning to perceive and explain the nature of problematic educational issues, 2) speculating as to ways through which it might be possible to devise solutions to such problems, and 3) testing plans that are designed to promote understanding and problem solving in various learning settings.

Methodology

One set of three interrelated goals forms the core of this investigation. I have aimed to: A) develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of human interactions, in particular the transmission of culture, which seems to promote the systematic reproduction of inequality; B) articulate an approach that can serve to enhance the potential of educational frameworks to promote transformational, emancipatory learning, which has the potential to

replace inadvertent social reproduction with a balance of continuity and accommodation; and C) develop conceptual tools that promote effective collaboration among educators in learning to counter inequitable and oppressive patterns of behavior through reflecting on their personal and professional experience. Drawing on the work of others from a diverse array of scholarly pursuits, and based on what I have developed upon the foundations they established, I have combined these three elements in order to create a complex approach to understanding the effects of power relationships, encountering diversity and the nature of cultural transmission in the learning process.

I join in a number of scholarly conversations in this endeavor. At times I go to the heart of long standing discussions, such as social reproduction theory and reflective practice, and at times I stand on the margins of others, such as constructivist epistemology, critical pedagogy and biblical exegesis, as I establish the connections that have enabled me to build a scaffolding for the purpose of enabling educators to expand their capacity to grapple with the challenges they face.

I draw upon several bodies of literature. The philosopher, Donald Schön, for instance, focused on reflective practice as a tool to connect theory and practice. Professor of adult learning, Steven Brookfield, has drawn important connections between reflective practice and critical theory. Political theorist Michael Walzer has written about the connection between social criticism, a tradition he traces back to the Hebrew prophets, and committed citizenship. He explains how enriching cultural identity strengthens the potential for multicultural democracy. Theologian Mordicai Kaplan reinterpreted the meaning of supernatural stories of the Bible through a humanistic lens which views democracy as a

higher manifestation of ancient values. These are a few examples of the existing infrastructure upon which I build.

This research contributes to the literature on learning and on the professional development of educators. The application of Complex Reflective Practice and the use of cultural context to communicate conceptual underpinning are examples of how members of a school faculty or the staff of an educational program can infuse their practice with culturally relevant tools of research and analysis. When educators become teacher/learners, understanding their environments through the process of reflective investigation, they can learn to identify and resolve problems and to teach problem solving. A setting characterized by such an approach can become a small part of the world where an educator can have a direct impact, one that can have a ripple effect among other learners, students and colleagues alike.

Format: Conveying a Complex Theory

‘Theory’ is used in different contexts to mean different things. A theory could be an assumption or a speculative hypothesis yet to be investigated, as in a detective’s theory about how a crime might have been committed. It could also be an idea or a set of ideas that explain a phenomenon, such as the theory of gravity. Or, it could be a principle or a set of principles that provide a basis for practice in an activity, such as music theory. This explanation of the format is an attempt to clarify the essential complexity of this investigation. Each of the three main parts of this investigation focuses on one element of the whole. Together, through the integration of speculation, explanation and operation, the

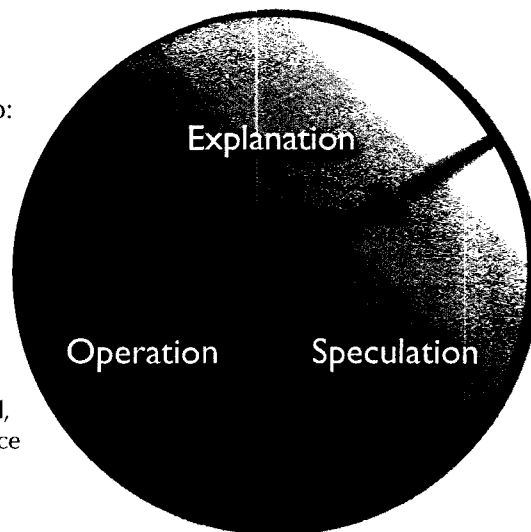
three parts comprise a complex theory of learning.

This complex theory includes the following three components: A) an explanation of the operating mechanism of a phenomena, a situation or a system, B) speculation about attaining a deeper understanding of the subject of the investigation and how it might be effected by intervention, and C) an operational framework for the investigation to test and refine the theory, as it is experienced in practice. Together, the three components constitute a mechanism for creating a continuous cycle of action, speculation and reflection based on experience and confirmed explanation.

A Complex Theory

offers a coherent and consistant underpinning to:

- *Explain:*
How it is that things are as they are?
- *Speculate:*
How might problematic issues be resolved?
- *Operationalize:*
How can the theory be tested, evaluated and put into practice to effect change?



The three components interact in a continual cycle of mutual influence.

Diagram 1

Each of the three parts in the body of this dissertation corresponds primarily to one of the three components of a complex theory, and each is integrally connected to the other two. Grasping the significance of the whole is dependent upon understanding the separate

elements as well as appreciating the interrelationships between them. The three parts fit together in an integrated system. The following is a brief summary of each of the three main parts of this dissertation, which correspond to the three elements of a complex theory.

Part I - Explanation: The Complexity of the Issue Under Investigation

Part I, “The Issue Under Investigation,” provides an explanation of the phenomenon of social reproduction and the nature of the assumptive thinking which supports it. It includes a review of the positions of various researchers, with a focus on the problems caused and/or reinforced by social reproduction in educational settings. It also includes a discussion of the critical thinking necessary to mitigate the negative effects of unexamined reproduction in culturally inherited understanding and behavior.

Becoming aware of inequity in society is an elementary step toward understanding the manner in which people cope with and manage power in their mutual dealings with others. Learning to perceive the distribution and the nature of manipulation of power in a group or a society can enable the observer to understand complicated relationships. Effective attempts at remediation of a problem require a grasp of the complexity of a situation. The process of developing an aptitude for grasping the complexity of power relationships and acting to resolve conflicting interests begins with gaining an essential understanding of the issues and the particular character of a given state of affairs. This section is devoted to an exploration of the factors that establish and reinforce oppressive elements of human interaction.

Part II - Speculation: The System Functions and Accommodates Change

Part II, "Toward a Cultural Context for Emancipatory Education," includes a discussion of the nature of the transmission and transformation of culture and suggests that intentional cultural transformation can mitigate the negative effects of social reproduction to some extent. I then discuss the underpinnings of religious humanism in general, with a particular focus on my own cultural context. This is roughly the midpoint of Part II and of the dissertation. Up until this point, I expand the scope of the investigation. While the subsequent sections introduce additional material, I choose specific focal points from which to examine the field. At this stage, I will to narrow the focus, step by step. I begin by examining elements of biblical text that deal with emancipation in light of the questions raised thus far. I then examine more closely certain aspects of the text, which I understand to be particularly revealing in terms of understanding the nature of emancipatory thinking. I then shift the focus to an examination of Passover, the holiday when the theme of emancipation is most central to the experience of participating in Jewish culture. Most people do not study the text in depth, but the celebration of Passover provides an annual educational opportunity when the subject of emancipation can be brought to the dinner table. I then further narrow the focus to concentrate on one commentary that is commonly included in versions of the Haggadah, the anthology of readings for the celebration of Passover. I bring Part II to a close with this discussion of the educational implications of 'The Four Sons' a retelling of references to teaching children which appear in various places in the biblical narrative.

Part III - Operation: Substantiating Insight through Examining Practice

Part III, “Reflective Practice in Experiential Learning,” is a report on the application of the ideas developed in parts I and II. Part III includes a review of the model for in-service professional development that I designed and facilitated at Genesis, Brandeis University’s residential summer program for high school students. There is a description of the setting, as well as an explanation of the conceptual tools I developed in collaboration with and for educators. Examples of the investigations produced by the educators who participated in the Complex Reflective Practice learning process are discussed in Part III.

Each of the three sections introduced above describes a complex system, comprised of three elements (which are subsystems) that are characterized by changing interrelationships. Each of these systems also functions as a subsystem of a larger system comprised of the three main parts of this investigation. Diagram 2, below, provides a schematic map of the material covered in each part and in each subsection. Each sphere is influenced by and influences the other spheres in its system. These processes and mutual influences correspond to the explanation of the issues under investigation, speculation regarding addressing the issues and the implementation of an operation designed to address these issues. Each section has a primary focus, the first being on the explanation (E), the second on speculation (S) and the third on operation (O), but each section being a system in itself includes elements of all three. The numbers in diagram 2 refer to the corresponding sections of this investigation. Part I, II and III of the diagram appear in isolation after the

introduction to each part of this investigation.

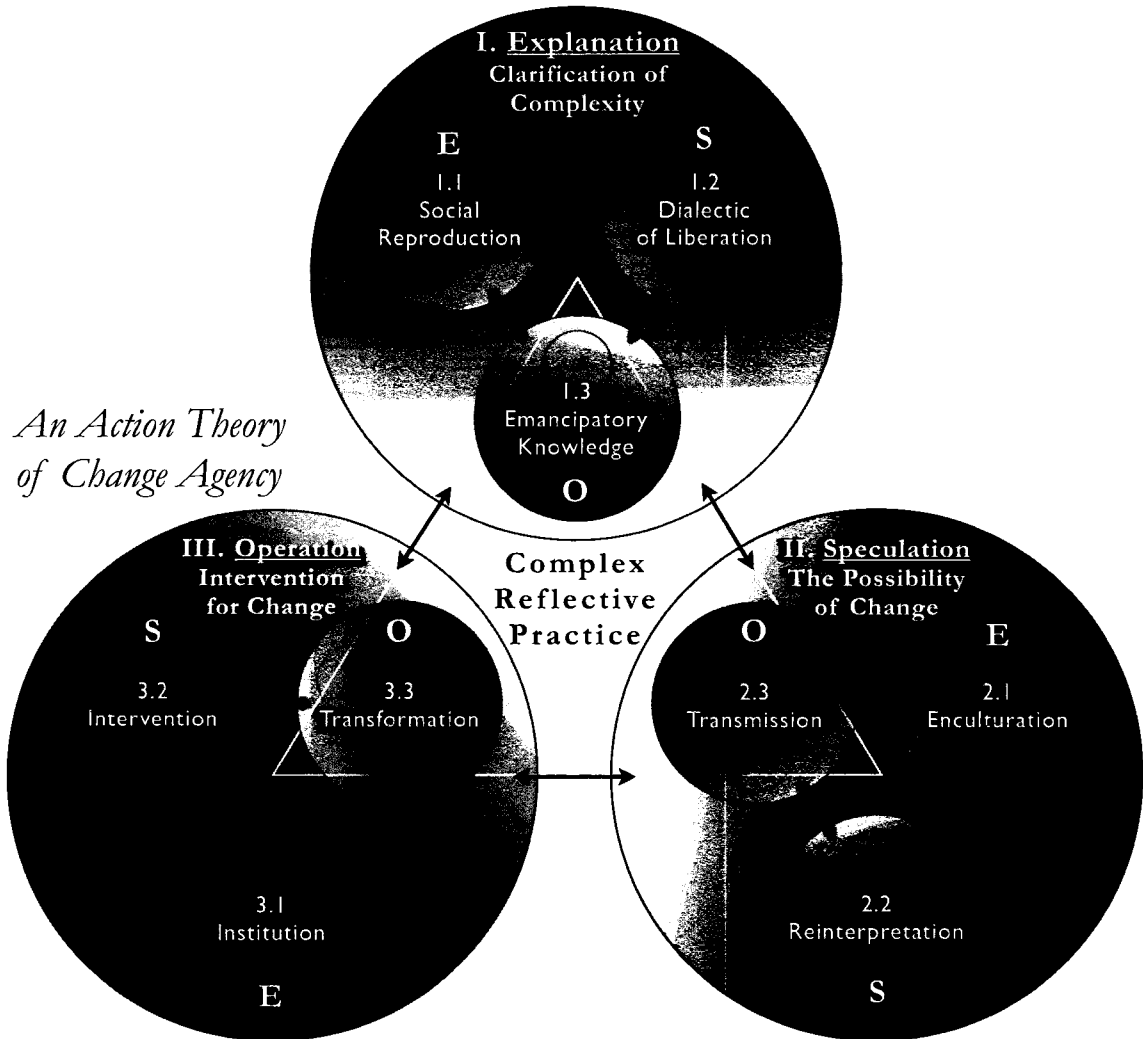


Diagram 2

The x.1 spheres in each region of the diagram function as a system, wherein *social reproduction* leads to the *enculturation* of values that are reflected in the *institutions* of society. The possible effect of the system comprised of the three x.2 spheres is that intentionally emphasizing the value of *liberation* (in spite of concomitant pressures that are also transmitted and institutionalized through social reproduction and enculturation) gives rise to

reinterpretation and can lead to an *intervention* to bring about change. The x.3 spheres create a system in which the *transmission* of *emancipatory knowledge* can bring about *transformation*.

The above diagram shows these subsystems as separate but related elements, functioning concurrently as part of a larger system. Understanding the inherent nature of this multiplex system, however, is a highly challenging proposition for several reasons. Neither the component subsystems nor the nature of their interrelationships is manifestly apparent. As such, people are not generally aware that the system exists, even when they are subject to its influence. Due to the alluring simplicity of linear explanations, even when the causality can be proven to be spurious, people often settle for an insufficient understanding of a complicated issue. As a result, complex systems can have the effect of confusing those who interact within the system itself. The intention of this reflective investigation is to clarify the complexity by dissolving the confusion caused by confounding assumptions that lead to false or incomplete understandings of experience.

Part I: The Issue Under Investigation

Introduction to Part I

Educational settings are microcosms of the communities and the societies in which they exist, where educators play a role in preparing young people for activity in the public sphere. Teaching subject matter and testing students may draw teachers' attention away from considering how they will accomplish their task as contributors to the shaping of society, but that does not diminish their influence. When educators either fail or choose not to realize their potential to promote the critical thinking of the learners they engage, they strengthen the possibility that preconceived notions will be inadvertently reenforced and unchallenged precedents will be reproduced.

Testing and grading promote the idea that study and hard work lead worthy people to succeed in school and beyond. While this may be accurate in many instances, schools can also become the very systems that reinforce stratification dominated by powerful interests prevalent in the surrounding society. Educational settings are not removed from the arenas of power relationships. As Stephen Brookfield illustrates,

An awareness of how the dynamics of power permeate all educational processes helps us realize that forces present in the wider society always intrude into the classroom. Classrooms are not limpid, tranquil ponds, cut off from the river of social, cultural and political life. They are contested spaces - whirlpools containing the contradictory crosscurrents of the struggles for material superiority and ideological legitimacy that exist in the world outside. When we become aware of the pervasiveness of power, we start to notice the oppressive dimensions to practices

that we had thought were neutral or even benevolent. (Brookfield, 1995, p. 9)

'Educational processes' are, of course, not limited to formal classrooms or schools. Learning occurs in extracurricular and out-of-school activities, ethnic and religious frameworks, youth groups, camps, families and neighborhood settings. People are always teaching and learning about and from one another, even if unconsciously, in every social situation. Oppression, similarly, is not limited to relationships with the clearly defined roles of blatant oppressor and dismally oppressed. The knotty intricacies of the oppressive dimensions of relationships can be highly difficult to identify, let alone rectify.

People spend the formative years of their lives learning to interpret and to interact in the world around them. Schools and other educational settings, whatever else they may be, are also engines of social and cultural transmission, where young people learn to cope with social problems and engage in the moral questions of childhood. Figuring out how to function effectively in the system is as integral to the experience of learning as is the process of grasping content that is formally transmitted.

The following diagram is the "Explanation" region of Diagram 2, the complete version of which appears in the format section of the introduction. This part of the whole depicts the three sections in Part I and the interrelationships between them, wherein each of the following sections affects and is affected by the others. Section 1.1 provides an explanation of the inevitable process of the reproduction of patterns of behavior and distribution in society. This characteristic of human society is the mechanism which provides continuity with valued and venerated elements of a culture. The same mechanism can be credited with

prolonging and in some cases exacerbating certain undesirable aspects of cultural continuity. Section 1.2 deals with the exercise or the manipulation of power, and the possibility of change. Section 1.3 focuses on the significance of different ways of knowing and the potential for learning to be a deeply transformative and emancipatory process.

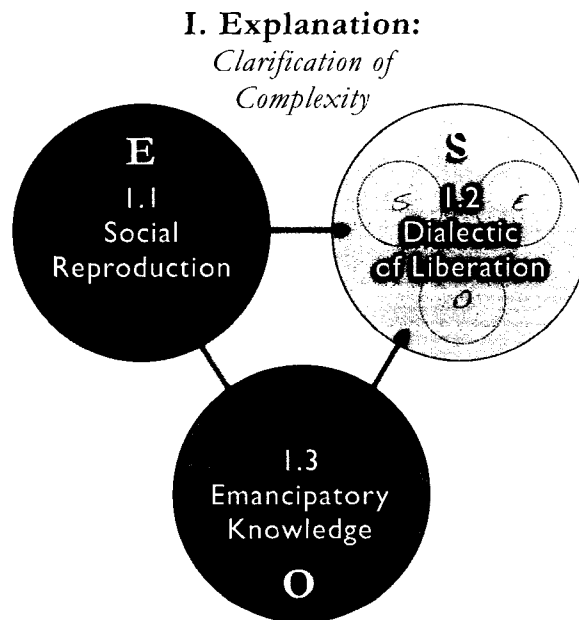


Diagram 2, Part I

1.1) The Inevitability and Variability of Social Reproduction

Pierre Bourdieu and subsequent social reproduction theorists draw on the works of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx to analyze how the class structure of society is reproduced from one generation to the next. (MacLeod, 1995, p.11) Bourdieu referred to three forms of fungible capital, economic, social and cultural, which can be accumulated and, under certain conditions, converted into money, education or other useful resources. There are four important aspects of cultural capital, or the ‘portfolio of assets’ people inherit from

their cultural milieu. 1) It is transmitted by class. 2) The value attached to the cultural capital of each class reflects socio-economics. 3) The job market remunerates academic success earned mainly by upper classes. 4) Schools convert social hierarchies into academic hierarchies. (MacLeod, 1995 p.14) The inheritance and the use or exploitation of cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, has more of an impact on success in the “academic market” than the widely accepted idea that a child’s natural aptitude and level of motivation will be rewarded in kind by an equal opportunity system.

The somewhat mysterious effect of cultural capital occurs through a generally recognizable, yet unconscious appreciation of behavior that indicates social position. Bourdieu calls this ‘habitus,’ and explains the effect of this ‘collective magic,’ which functions through the unspoken and inadvertently recognized cultural communication that contributes to the assumptions people make about one another. Bourdieu observed that “[T]he more the official transmission of capital is prevented or hindered, the more the effects of clandestine circulation of capital in the form of cultural capital become determinant in the reproduction of the social structure.” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 55) The resulting effect is that social position is unconsciously reproduced by the very institutions that claim to be gateways to a better future.

Those who reject this idea can claim that, unlike in the feudal system, for instance, young people in modern western societies can cross social divides. They can choose their friends as well as their professions without concern for the once overwhelming control of the aristocracy or institutionalized religion. Bourdieu could counter by explaining that while this

may seem to be the case, aspirations are actually defined by deeply internalized values, schemes of perception and actions which are subjective but largely common to members of a group or a class, and which dispose individuals to think and act in certain ways. "It is necessary and sufficient that the school ... should succeed in convincing individuals that they have themselves chosen or won the destinies which social destiny has assigned them in advance." (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 208) According to this view of human nature, schools implicitly reinforce the existing structure of society.

The validity of this theory does not require that it be the declared aim or perceived intention of the educators who facilitate the process. On the contrary, one essential element of social reproduction theory is that well-meaning actions inadvertently reinforce inequality in society, even though people may see themselves as intending to promote the opposite effect. The unconscious exercise of power is a matter of debate among social scientists. An array of theorists have developed somewhat differing approaches to understanding this phenomenon. Examined in perspective, their views can be placed along a continuum with some of the ideas leaning more toward a social structural explanation while others see a larger role for personal agency in the process of social reproduction.

The deterministic analysis maintains that social reproduction is an inevitable process due to the structure of society. Thinkers on the opposite end of the continuum assert an understanding of society based upon the relative autonomy of the individual who is an agent with options and free will. These positions are not totally at odds with one another. *Although placing them at opposite ends of a continuum accentuates the differences, none of*

the social reproduction theorists mentioned below totally discount the significance of structural determinism. While they have somewhat differing approaches, all of the theories attempt to explain how schools reinforce social inequality.

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis are essentially economic determinists. Their position focuses primarily on relations of production. Their correspondence principle claims that the classroom reflects the class structure. Subordinated to production process, children are socialized to accept and adopt the existing social relations of domination by the wealthy and subordination of the poor. Social relations of the school (authority and control, lack of control over curriculum, grading, competition) reflect the nature of relations of production in the workplace of the capitalist economy.

If the same conditions apply to all students, it might seem logical to conclude that they would all be molded into one class, not schooled and then redistributed into society according to their class origin. Researchers, however, have observed that schools serving working class neighborhoods are more regimented, emphasizing rules and behavior control, while suburban schools, favoring student participation and electives, emphasize the development of a value system stressing internalized standards of control. (MacLeod, 1995 p.12) Schools provide society with graduates who have learned both the variety of appropriate skills and the necessary values to take up their roles, in roughly the same position of their parents in the class structure. (MacLeod, 1995, p.13)

While obstacles to success may be real and even seem insurmountable at times, disadvantaged students do sometimes rise above their difficulties. These may be the

exceptions that prove the rule, or there may be other explanations for overcoming the boundaries of discrimination. In any case, the existence of even a small percentage of children who climb the social hierarchy suggests that the social economic relations alone can not explain the entire range of outcomes.

Paul Willis, in *Learning to Labor*, adopts the position that determinism is mediated by cultural milieu, not mechanistic causation. For students who do excel academically, rejection of the school and its concept of achievement is actually an insightful acceptance (albeit an unconscious realization) of the limits of their class background within the capitalist system. Good behavior is pointless in a system where a few individuals might overcome their background, but for their class, conformity promises no rewards. (MacLeod, 1995, p.19) According to Willis, cultural production is an active and a transformative process. The cultural attitudes and practices of working-class behavioral patterns such as contestation, resistance and compromise are not necessarily reflective of, or even traceable to, structural determinations or dominant ideologies. There is no clear separation of agency and structure. Neither can be fully understood in isolation from the other.

Social reproduction theory contends that ignoring an issue can amount to reinforcing the phenomenon. Although the variations of the theory that lean toward a more deterministic interpretation leave no other option, the premise that agency is a major factor suggests that it is possible to empower individuals and communities to take responsibility for influencing their direction in life. Henry Giroux's theory of student resistance to school, for example, bridges the divide between social structure and human agency. According to Giroux, it is not

a matter of deciding which of these elements dictates power relationships, but the nature of the dialectical relationship between them. In order to comprehend oppositional behavior, it is necessary to situate a person's explanation of his or her behavior within the interrelationships of peers, family, and work relations. (MacLeod, 1995, p.22)

1.2) Power, Repression and Emancipation

Recognizing Power Relationships

The exercise or manipulation of power in workplaces, social institutions and even in families is not simply a matter of overt struggles. The same holds true in schools, where coping with power relationships is not simply a matter of classroom management, or rewards and punishment. Not all power relationships can be easily recognized. Steven Lukes suggests that, "Observable conflicts would be acknowledged by those involved in the conflict, but latent ones would not be readily admitted due to ideological distortion of the agents' perception of their real self-interest." (Hoy, 1986, p. 125) This points to an explanation as to how it is possible that educators motivated by noble intention may actually be instruments of the repression experienced by the very people they intend to help.

What sort of 'ideological distortion' is at work and how does it function? While there is no mystery about the nature of relationships that can be characterized by the blatantly oppressive subjugation of the obviously powerless by the manifestly powerful, the nature of more subtle power relationships may not be evident, even to those involved. As being dominated is not likely to be a desirable state for one to accept or embrace, one may not choose to see oneself in that light. On the other side of the power differential, while it may

be considered advantageous to be powerful, it is not necessarily desirable to be considered oppressive.

Critical theorists have observed that “the effects of power are often repressed: both the dominating group and the dominated may be unconscious of the exercise of power.” (Hoy, 1986, p. 126) That which one actually knows about one’s behavior can be replaced by what one prefers to believe to be the case, and, in the mind of the repressed individual, belief can replace the empirical reality. According to Foucault, “this subjugation is not something imposed on one class (the oppressed workers) by another (the dominant class); it increasingly permeates and characterizes all aspects of society.” (Hoy, 1986, p. 131) The existence of latent hegemonic conflicts explains the presence of inequitable relations without sinister or purposefully manipulative motivation on the part of the dominant actor in a relationship.

The Dialectic of Liberation

Emancipation cannot be brought about merely through the liberation of some individuals from some elements of oppression. Oppression is a zero-sum game. There are those who target and those who are targeted. One is either oppressor or oppressed. No one is truly liberated; all are bound up in oppressive relationships and dependent upon the system.

According to Jurgen Habermas, a contemporary critical theorist in the tradition of the Frankfurt school, “Emancipation from power is a fundamental interest of knowledge-

acquisition. This freedom would be gained when knowledge reflects back on itself and sees through false authority to the true consensus that could be achieved only in a totally emancipated society of autonomous, responsible persons.” (Hoy, 1986, p. 132) Undiminished liberation, then, is contingent upon a total transformation of society. It can only be brought about by freeing an entire society from oppressive relationships.

Analysing the effects of the abuse of power does not in itself necessarily offer any solution to the problem of irreciprocal power relationships. It is difficult to imagine, let alone establish a society in which power struggles have given way to unfailing collaboration and mutual responsibility. Recognizing that everyone needs to learn to effectively counter the negative effects of power in order to achieve a totally emancipated society is tantamount to accepting the inevitability of structural oppression. Given what seems to be an unattainable dream as a measure of success, it is questionable if critical theory offers a realistic approach to the structural inequity inherent in society as it has been understood by social reproduction theorists.

In spite of the power of critical theory to explain the nature of power dynamics, it has been found to lack the tools to yield effective plans to remedy the problems it addresses. Due to the difficulty in “grasping and operationalizing the concepts of critical theory” the analysis of existing economic and social structures and resultant power dynamics has not generated many workable strategies for effecting change. In fact, critical theory itself has been criticized for “asserting domination and reproducing a culture of silence in educational settings” due to its “technical jargon, obscure references, and ambiguous phrasing.”

(Pietrykowski, 1996, p. 84) The scholarly analysis of power relationships, removed as it is from the daily experience of most workplaces, schools and families, tends toward highly nuanced philosophical arguments, whereas the lives of most people are more likely characterized by compromises and mitigating circumstances. It comes as no surprise that oppressed people wading through the swampy realities of life do not often turn to the academy in search of a deeper comprehension of differential power relationships in order to arrive at solutions to the problems that leave them dominated by those whose interests are at odds with their own.

Beyond the issue of intellectual accessibility, Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (1998) has criticized the tendency of contemporary critical theorists to focus solely upon the view of the weak and alienated, the predicaments of which groups they analyze. He rejects the idea that the Truth of the oppressor should be replaced by the Truth of the oppressed. According to Gur-Ze'ev, understanding the legitimate knowledge of the weak as well as the legitimate knowledge of the powerful can provide a more truthful understanding of complex realities. Gur-Ze'ev's analysis suggests that unbiased education would present and value opposing views in society, not represent the limited interests of certain groups.

It is clearly not possible to eradicate power relationships from the nature of human relations. This fact, however, does not necessarily support a deterministic conclusion regarding the possibility of managing the inevitable inequities concerning conflicts over power, wealth, resources or the access needed to influence the control over ownership and distribution. The promotion of liberation is a matter of mitigating the effects of exploitation,

even if it is not now and may never be possible to complete the process. One key element of the measure of justice in a society is the extent to which the abuse of power can be reined in, in order to alleviate suffering and reduce exploitation.

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire strongly emphasized the role of the individual to influence the unfolding of history through interactions between opposing forces. 'Contradictions,' as Freire refers to them, are resolved by the emergence of new situations which are different from any of the possibilities that might have come about had the forces not conflicted. New realities are characterized by new confrontations that will resolve themselves, even as they develop yet newer realities fraught with new contradictions. According to this Hegelian approach, the dialectical process of history unfolds through interactions between opposing forces.

Paulo Freire's world outlook was forged primarily through his experience with poverty and his work with illiterate adults. According to Freire, his approach "is rooted in concrete situations and describes the reactions of laborers (peasant or urban) and of middle-class persons whom I have observed directly or indirectly during the course of my educative work." (Freire, 1986, p. 21) His practice and theory were inextricably bound together.

I know that I had been sent [to the Recife slums] ... Then I began to read Marx and the more I did the more I became convinced that we should become absolutely committed to a global process of transformation. But what is interesting in my case... my "meetings" with Marx never suggested to me to stop "meeting" Christ. I always spoke to both of them in a very loving way... Sometimes people say to me that I am contradictory... I don't consider myself contradictory in this... I am a man of faith... I feel myself very comfortable with this. (Bell, Gaventa & Peter, 1990, p.81)

Freire drew upon the Marxist political tradition as well as the liberation theology of Latin

American Catholic priests, combined with his personal experience with poverty to develop a methodology for teaching illiterate Brazilian adults to read and to look critically at their society.

“Liberating education,” according to Freire, “consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information.” (Freire, 1986, p. 67) He referred to the latter as the banking system, based on a relationship in which the dominant teacher has what the passive student needs. Students are receptacles to be filled by their teachers, who deposit knowledge into the minds their students as an investment in the development of the student who is to be formed according to the teacher’s notion of success. Freire, however, rejects this notion in favor of a libertarian constructivist epistemology.

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. ... The raison d’être of libertarian education, on the other hand, lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students. (Freire, 1986, p. 58-9)

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who learns through dialogue with the students, who become teachers while they learn. Teachers and students become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire, 1986, p. 69)

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated.

Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed. (Freire, 1986, p. 69)

If people can grasp the essential nature of their reality, they can effectively act as contradicting forces to their own oppression. Freire does not suggest that this possibility is inevitable. “Within history, in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompleteness.” (Freire, 1986, p. 27) Freire advocates developing a reflective emancipatory capacity that enables people to bring their efforts to bear upon determining their futures.

The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to reject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion. (Freire, 1986, p. 31)

Unrealized potential, accordingly, is the full measure of humanity. People can either become more fully human or less so depending upon their understanding of their condition, which is realized through experience. One’s ability to bring about change in the world can be augmented by purposeful development of a conscious appreciation of one’s situation and relationships with others.

It would not be sufficient for someone or for a group to overcome an oppressor only to become oppressive, which is simply the other role that oppression prepares people to assume for themselves. People who are trapped in an oppressive conceptualization of society either accept the identity of being oppressed or they choose to be on the controlling end of

the relationship. In either case, they identify with the nature of the oppressive relationship.

Freire's understanding of the potential of human agency is the ability to effect a process of reconfiguring the power differential between oppressed and oppressor. This can begin through a process of struggle and manipulation, but the process can only come to full fruition if and when both become willing to collaborate in confronting and contradicting the pattern of their oppressive relationship. Emancipation, then, is both dialectical, in that it is dependent upon a series of conflicts and resolutions, and dialogical, in that the further emancipatory action requires successive stages of reflection and meaningful communication. Co-learning through mutual understanding is ultimately necessary in order to reorient power relationships.

The most humanizing form of resolution, according to Freire, is mutual emancipation through critical dialogue. Both sides must reject the oppressive system and adopt a different mode of interaction, not merely a different role within an oppressive context, in order to eradicate the cycle. A process of humanization begins when conflicting sides work together to understand each other's experience, as well as their own, and to move beyond the oppressive assumptions that inform their relationships.

1.3) The Tree of Knowledge: What Does it Mean to Know?

Understandings, Assumptions & Discrepancies

In order to question assumptions, it is first necessary to identify them as worthy of scrutiny. According to Brookfield,

The most distinctive feature of the reflective process is its focus on hunting assumptions. ... the taken for granted beliefs about the world, and our place within it, that seem so obvious to us as not to need to be stated explicitly. In many ways we are our assumptions. ... Becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how we think and act is one of the most puzzling intellectual challenges we face in our lives. It is also something we instinctively resist, for fear of what we might discover. Who wants to clarify and question assumptions she has lived by for a substantial period of time, only to find out that they don't make sense? (Brookfield, 1995)

Unexamined assumptions provide a foundation upon which to construct further unexamined assumptions. Negligence of reason is self-perpetuating. The more developed one's structure of reliance upon assumption, the less likely one will be inclined to dismantle the weak intellectual infrastructure that provides the framework for thought (or lack of thought) and behavior.

Like the foundation and the weight bearing beams of a building, an intellectual infrastructure is hidden from view and therefore not subject to regular scrutiny, if it is subject to scrutiny at all. This lack of diligence regarding the standards of design, production and maintenance of both the knowledge we construct to understand the world around us and the physical buildings we construct to shelter us is a matter of unperceived risk; out of sight, out of mind. Such ignorance and disregard conceal problems that do not present themselves until they become impossible to ignore.

The value of the adage, 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' manifests itself when systems break down, at times causing disastrous results. Even so, many people demonstrate a preference for the bromide 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it,' which supports the escalation of a faulty assumption to the status of excepted 'truth.' As such, when structures

assumed to be sound do collapse, people are often surprised and ill-equipped to respond to the ensuing problems, often looking to place blame, rather than to accept responsibility for not having invested the time, effort and necessary resources to ensure the integrity of the construction upon which they relied.

Assumptions are problematic regarding what people understand about others and their surrounding environment, as well as about themselves. Their own actions that are based in assumption may not bear the burden of proof in an investigation. The discrepancies between what people think of their actions, or would like others to think about them, and the actual underpinnings of their behavior have been characterized in the following way, by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön:

When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is this theory-in-use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory; furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories.

We cannot learn what someone's theory-in-use is simply by asking him. We must construct his theory-in-use from observations of his behavior. In this sense, constructs of theories-in-use are like scientific hypotheses; the constructs may be inaccurate representations of the behavior they claim to describe. (Argyris & Schön, 1974)

In other words, one's unexamined behavior may be actively contradicting one's sincere beliefs. People may unknowingly rely upon their worthy and convincing espoused theories, and yet perpetuate the continuance of their theories-in-use, even though there may be a wide gap between the two. Maintaining the discrepancy could be due to a lack of self-awareness,

an inability or a lack of desire to understand the significance of one's actions. This common mechanism enables people to function without learning from their experience, even while they suffer from the consequences of their own behavior. Through a process of layering confidence over ignorance over behavior which may be untenable on its own merit, one becomes an obstacle to his or her own emancipation from an unreasonable situation.

Consider, for example, a teacher who truly cares about the education of her students. She knows that her students need to be focused and engaged in order to learn. She begins class by quieting the students in the room in order to get them ready to learn. Her espoused theory is that she wants to create a positive environment for learning. Her assumption is that quiet is a necessary and achievable prerequisite. She might say, "Good morning class." in order to let them know that she wants their attention. If that is not sufficient to establish the atmosphere she seeks, she might say, "Let's quiet down now. I'm waiting." Perhaps she has a little rhyme, such as "One, two, three; eyes on me!" to which the students are supposed to respond, "One, two; eyes on you!" but, what if they don't respond as she directs them? She might have a few tricks up her sleeve. She could flash the lights on and off to get the kids' attention. Maybe she has some positive prizes for children who behave well, while she might begin writing the names of noisy children on the board. If and when she loses her patience, she might raise her voice, bang a hand down on her desk, threaten to keep the certain pupils or the whole class in from recess. She might get sarcastic, saying "I'm not standing here for my health!" or place some blame on the class: "It's your time you're wasting." But they are wasting her time too, and she may be wasting theirs as well. Perhaps she shares the

responsibility for the impasse.

All classes surely need some level of quiet and cooperation. The simple example outlined above is not intended to be an indictment of all teachers who establish quiet learning environments. Some classrooms do generally get out of hand and need to be brought back into line. This might be a regular occurrence, with the teacher who perceives herself to be a nurturing individual feeling the need to be a classroom manager before she can be a teacher. Many things could be going in the classroom when students are displaying so much resistant behavior. Perhaps they don't respect the teacher, and this is their way of showing it, or perhaps they have become accustomed to the annoying ritual, which is a sort of test of wills wherein the teacher and the students pit themselves in opposition to each other.

What ostensibly began as an effort to create a positive environment for learning actually became a contentious struggle for control of the room. By insisting on establishing quiet before class can begin, the teacher has in effect relinquished control of the atmosphere to the students who can see that they have the upper hand, unless she raises her hand (physically or metaphorically) and uses threats to force submission.

In such a situation, a teacher's sincere espoused theory might be, "I have a lot to offer these kids, and I love teaching, but we can't achieve our common goals unless we begin in a quiet, respectful atmosphere that will promote learning." Upon closer scrutiny, however, her theory-in-use could be that she must be in control of the environment, and that no one will do anything unless she permits it. The children can get what they need only if and when she is in control. The teacher talks about creating an atmosphere for learning, but the children

experience an atmosphere of overt control, which overshadows the learning environment. This can go on year in and year out as a recurring theme that characterizes a school.

In a best case scenario, the teacher gains control of the environment and really does shift into a different mode of behavior, but not until the first lesson of establishing the power relationship has been learned. In the worst case scenario, the teacher never gains control and, when combined with other factors indicative of a failing educational system, the relationships between the teachers and the students deteriorate to a point where the school becomes a hotly contested space that breeds or exacerbates resistant behavior, and teachers become targets for intimidation and even violence in schools that are plagued by vandalism. For the students in such a competitive relationship, disrupting the environment is victory. If the promise of a good education is not in itself convincing, what motivation do the students have to give in to domination when what the teachers call 'learning' is understood by their students to mean acquiescence?

A school is, of course, not a closed system. It is a tremendously complex environment that exists within an even more complex community. Both the teachers and the students are subject to countless additional influences beyond what is happening in a given classroom at any given time. Out-of-school influences can have deleterious or constructive effects on what happens in school, but if there is not an essentially positive atmosphere in a school, there is much room for a potentially problematic situation to become exceedingly problematic.

This illustration is not intended to be a characterization of all schooling, but of what can

happen, and does indeed happen in some cases. Such realities can be attributed, in part, to the fact that the real problems are often ignored rather than addressed. Those real problems can be hidden behind the discrepancy between espoused theories and theories-in-use. Focusing on solving an improperly identified problem may well lead to an exacerbation of the real causes, which are not being addressed. A situation in need of an intervention that is not forthcoming is unlikely to repair itself, and may continue to degenerate until the system breaks down.

Students are also subject to the pitfalls of discrepancies between espoused theories and theories-in-use among themselves. A room full of students with various behaviors and responses, intentional and unintentional, understood and misunderstood, can lead to poor perceptions of what is happening in the public sphere of their class or school. Administrators add further layers of complexity to the situation, bringing with them additional power relationships, perspectives and assumptions, as do parents and others who can exercise influence over the school environment. Criminal elements in or near the school yard can also impact the balance of power, especially among young people who do not perceive themselves to have real opportunities in the legal economy. Community or religious organizations with missions that reinforce the goals of the school might be able to exert effective counter influences to the pressures and the temptations of illegal behavior.

A common espoused theory of the purpose of schooling is that teachers and administrators want to engender among their students qualities such as a thirst for lifelong learning, the pursuit of excellence and a commitment of service to society. Test preparation

does not necessarily help students to focus upon the learning process. Neither is it necessarily focused upon the development of the skills they will need to excel beyond the classroom. Such understandings and experiences may be unquantifiable. In any case, they are likely to go unassessed by a system designed to measure success in the classroom.

If educators espouse lofty goals while their actual work is focused upon training students to get good grades, and the system assesses only the measurable outcomes mandated by state and federal testing requirements, it is quite possible that the schools can register acceptable progress or even win awards of excellence without doing more than paying lip service to their espoused goals. The inverse might also be true. If the schools are focused on matters of citizenship and socialization, and they do not adhere to prescribed testing regimens and progress toward standardized goals, they might be considered to be failing schools. It is not always the case that the schools have the funding, the time and the staff to concentrate on all of the desired priorities, and the stipulations for receiving funding are likely to dictate curricular decisions more than the needs of certain students in a particular school.

Gaining awareness of such discrepancies is one mechanism for beginning to break down a tolerance for the self-deception that can lead to either subjugation to the self-defeating interests of others, or to explaining away one's oppressive tendencies toward others, or both. Not all knowledge, however, has the power to bring about such understanding. It is possible to limit one's pursuit of knowledge to non-threatening information. Attaining knowledge that has the potential to shed light upon a problem in such a manner that suggests a need for change has the potential to generate instability in a system. It is by definition provocative and

possibly even subversive or seditious, because change is not always considered desirable, particularly when it contradicts the goals of powerful interested parties.

Returning to the classroom teacher described above, her espoused theory was based on one principle: promoting learning. Her theory-in-use was controlling the environment. If she were to see the difference between the two principles and understand the nature of the discrepancy between them, she might prefer the first principle to the second. After receiving unsettling feedback on her work, she might reject what she has seen, or she might learn to ask a nuanced question such as, “In what ways does controlling the environment promote learning, and in what ways does it detract from it? Are there perhaps better ways to get beyond the stumbling block of establishing control and onto the business of learning?”

If the teacher were in an environment that promoted the value of learning from the experience of teaching, which can go well beyond a simple system of trial and error for managing a quiet classroom, she could reorient her focus from being the teacher to being a learner for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of her own teaching style. She could participate in a learning method, such as peer consultation, working with a mentor or facilitated viewing of a video of her classroom teaching, through which she could learn to parse her actions in order to identify when controlling the room was contributing to the sort of learning she really had intended for her students and when it was detracting from it.

Allowed and even encouraged to question her own practice, and given the opportunity to do so with a colleague or a consultant, could enable the teacher to stop focusing on the technical problem of the decible level in the classroom, and move from generating practical

stop-gap measures, to focusing on what motivates the students to learn, perhaps even more effectively than first establishing her authority to quiet the room. Distributing a project that is in itself challenging and engaging might draw the children into the learning faster and more effectively. Then, if she needs to supply directions or make announcements, she can do so when the children are engaged and perhaps looking for assistance, rather than focused on their resistance to beginning the school day. She might have them working in groups, where it is acceptable and expected that there be some productive commotion in the room. Or, she might begin the day with a noisy activity that draws her students into her attempt to gain their attention without forcing them to quiet down right away. Then she can learn to more effectively control the flow of energy into a quieter activity.

The process is not always simple. Flicking the lights on and off might be effective. Playing a game might or might not work better. In any case, it is not sufficient merely to have a selection of contingency plans. In order to cope with whatever might transpire in the classroom, a teacher needs to consider a full array of available options as well as how and when they can be employed with success. Understanding the dynamic of the relationships in a given setting and the effects of powerful variables in the environment can enhance one's ability to navigate difficult situations.

Assumption

Reliance upon assumption, rather than verification, is a risky characteristic of the human thought process. The problem is magnified by the fact that much assuming is done inadvertently, rather than in an intentional manner. It would be impossible to verify every

assumption upon which people rely, or even to consider doing so in each instance that a person relies upon an assumption. People rely upon their intuitive sense of when to trust their tendency to accept things as they seem and when to pay attention to a figurative yellow light that signals caution or a red light that signals some sort of danger. People generally function under the assumption that if things are moving along smoothly, they need a reason to stop, rather than a reason to go beyond.

No one has the time or the knowledge to investigate the myriad issues about which everyone must constantly make choices. I assume that there is a structural engineer authorized to periodically monitor the safety of the bridge I cross every day. There is a principal at the school who will check to make sure that my child's teacher is competent. A government agency evaluates food and drugs to make sure that they are safe for our consumption. The police protect my neighborhood. I assume that I can rely upon these people, even though I often do not know who they are, and I rarely if ever confirm that my assumptions are reliable. As long as the bridge does not collapse, my child is doing well in school, no one I know is poisoned and my house is not burglarized, life is good and so—it seems—are my assumptions. When something goes wrong, it is often too late to correct for previous errors that might have been avoidable.

People learn to interpret the surrounding environment in order to navigate their way through life. Assumptions and quick decisions are relied upon when there is not enough time or sufficient will to perform more in-depth analytical processes. The more assumptions are borne out by experience, the more people can be reassured that it makes sense to

substitute assumptive judgement for evidence, even to the point where an assumption seems so convincing that it is taken to be definitive proof. The conclusion supported by the indisputable fact that many assumptions are indeed accurate is that the cognitive process of assuming works most of the time. It is either verifiably sound, even when unverified, or it at least serves the purpose of keeping a system operational, even though problems may go undetected.

Take, for example, the multiple and interdependent systems functioning on the roadways. A brake system functions within the larger system of a car, which functions within the larger system of traffic patterns. The traffic system functions well because in spite of the fact that people are moving toward each other at high speeds inside projectiles with enough mass to crush a human being, drivers who are unknown to one another are generally safe in assuming that the vehicles they encounter are in good running order and being operated by people who follow the same set of rules.

Now add to the scenario a car with worn brakes that have not been inspected recently. Neither the drivers of the other vehicles nor the driver of this car realize that the brakes are worn, nearly to the point where they will malfunction. As long as the faulty brakes work well enough to stop the vehicle before a collision, it seems safe to assume that they are in working order. This happens not to be a safe assumption, but there is no outward indication of clear and present danger. The system still seems to be in working order, but when systems break down it often seems that there is no apparent warning. If the factors that contribute to the breakdown were more obvious, more breakdowns could be avoided.

As the brakes continue to deteriorate, the previously safe assumption that they do not need to be checked or repaired becomes increasingly risky. By some point, the faulty brake on one of the wheels is barely working at all, and the other brake is being worn down at an even faster rate because it has to compensate and provide all of the stopping power normally provided by two brakes. Perhaps there is a signal to indicate the problem. An experienced driver might be able to notice the difference. If the brakes squeal, the driver could interpret the noise as a warning that the system is in danger of failing. But what if an inexperienced driver has the windows closed, the air conditioner blowing and music playing? The signal-to-noise ratio (the sound of the squealing brake masked by the extraneous sounds) could so heavily favor hearing the noise that the signal might be indiscernable, especially to an imperceptive observer who is neither prepared for nor focused upon interpreting the indication of an impending breakdown in the system.

Many human interactions are more complex than one signal-to-noise ratio. Multiple factors compound the difficulty of avoiding potential problems. Add to the potentially dangerous traffic situation described above that it has been raining and the clouds are just now clearing. An oncoming truck driver approaches a green traffic light that turns yellow just as he shifts his head to avoid bright sun glare on the windshield. The truck runs out of room to stop and goes through a red light. The driver of the car is momentarily distracted by children arguing in the back seat. She slams on the brakes as she enters the intersection, but finds herself skidding into an accident. The slowed reactions of the tired truck driver, the slippery wet road, the glaring sun, the music on the radio, the drone of air conditioner, the

loud passengers, the busy intersection and the failing brakes all combine to generate a cacophonous scenario that obliterates the signals which the drivers need in order to operate their vehicles safely.

Systems are often subject to noise that masks the signals which are vital to their functioning. A system or a person that functions with a high tolerance for unverified assumptions is highly vulnerable, because assumptive thinking can lead one to have confidence in manifestly defective understandings. There can be random noise which is generated incidentally, or systematic noise which is endemic to fixed ideological thinking. At the same time, a system can be structured to reduce the signal to noise ratio by applying standards of critical evaluation to assumptions.

In contrasting 'critical' against 'ideological' thinking, I follow the use of the latter term as defined by the anthropologist, Clifford Geertz:

Like the politics it supports, [ideology] is dualistic, opposing the pure "we" to the evil "they," proclaiming that he who is not with me is against me. It is alienative in that it distrusts, attacks, and works to undermine established political institutions. It is doctrinaire in that it claims complete and exclusive possession of political truth and abhors compromise. It is totalistic in that it aims to order the whole of social and cultural life in the image of its ideals, futuristic in that it works toward a utopian culmination of history in which such an ordering will be realized. (Geertz, 1973, p. 198)

An ideology, in this sense, is not the product of a valid examination of evidence. It rather reflects a tendency toward judgement that is predetermined according to standards of unconditional assumptions. The ideological viewpoint dismisses the possibility of inherent contradictions in a closed system of logic. Critical thinking, in contrast, requires the

avoidance of a priori ideological commitments to ideas or assumptions.

Critical thinking is unlike a belief system, which might be constructed upon a strict interpretation of a political ideology, or upon religious texts considered by adherents to be divine revelation which justifies a certain order. It requires a commitment to continually examine the nature of relationships and the way people function in them, but avoids formulation into an alternate ideology with its own fixed internal logic. Commitments that require unwavering allegiance to an authoritative Truth dismiss the possibility of critical engagement.

There is no guarantee that critical thinking will not degenerate over time and eschew the standards of valid logic and evidence in favor of indulging an alluring falsehood or denying an undesirable truth. Criticality, therefore, can not become removed from reality; it must remain deeply engaged in reflecting upon experience. The critical position requires openness and responsiveness to both internal and external critique. The following analysis of the human thought process suggests an understanding of the mechanisms that allow errors in logic and judgement to go undetected. If they can be identified, then perhaps they can also be counteracted.

Intuition, Insight & Interpretation

Intuition is the first stage of deriving meaning from the input one's brain receives. It provides part of the foundation of complex intelligent thinking. In spite of the potential it may hold to enable one to sense and begin to understand something that is not yet clear, the significance of intuitive thinking is downplayed in settings where articulate explanations are

prioritized and valued above the expression of feelings. The idea that proof counts for more than a hunch and that a feeling should not be considered authoritative evidence seems to have permeated social values in such a manner as to nearly delegitimize the influence of intuition. At the same time, it is the intelligent feeling, the unrefined sense that there is something worth looking into, which often launches the investigation. Weak intuitive perception minimises the possibility of identifying problems that might lead to important answers to essential questions.

Insight is the reflective capacity that enables people to grasp the nature and the significance of what they observe. It is the ability to see beyond the surface of impressions and encounters, the quality that makes it possible to deeply comprehend one's often ignored intuitive perceptions, which are barely more than fleeting sensations. Highly refined insight is a sort of cognitive inoculation against falling victim to ill-conceived and ill-founded assumptions, although it would be intellectually precarious to think that one could become immune to the possibility of committing an error in logic.

Interpretation is the process of organizing information gathered through experience, filtered through intuition and comprehended through insight. It is a matter of extrapolating and synthesizing various ideas and bits of evidence that enable people to see correlations between what they already know and what they are discovering anew. While one interpreter might rely on conventional wisdom or an authoritative source, or simply be willing to accept an unverified explanation out of a desire for expediency, another might strive to achieve a higher sense of certainty by applying a critical analysis to evaluate the significance of a

situation in order to arrive at an accurate and authentic interpretation. Developing critical insight through the experience of looking deeply at issues in order to understand their essential nature is the cultivation of quality control for the thought process.

A thought process which begins with input triggering an intuitive response can be concluded almost instantaneously with an assumption. The question that may be left unanswered, and quite often even goes unasked, is whether or not the quickly concluded process actually precluded the justification for further inquiry. It is, after all, not necessary to belabor every intuitive thought; if humans were not capable of relying upon reasonable assumptions in their decision making, people would have to struggle with the challenge of making sense of each and every routine experience. Assumption, however, lends itself to the possibility of imprecise or erroneous attribution of causality.

In some cases, only when an assumption proves to be incorrect due to a system breakdown does it become obvious that the situation should have been investigated. Retracing the details of a scenario may offer indicators as to what clues of the impending breakdown were available, yet went unnoticed. By exercising one's capacity to identify the initial manifestations of symptoms that indicate problems, it is possible to strengthen one's intuitive ability to observe and infer that there is more to a particular situation than initially meets the eye. One can learn to seek out and interpret signals as to when it is necessary to actually verify an assumption through the experience of learning to identify assumptions and carrying out investigations to ascertain their validity. Simple assumptions will be easy to disqualify or confirm, but more deeply embedded assumptions will be more difficult to

observe, let alone evaluate. As with any other acquired skill, the quality of interpretation is a function of the cultivation of innate ability.

Interpretation reflects the depth of one's intellectual capacity. Dull intuition and dim insight cannot produce a sharp intellect. Honing intellectual capacity is a matter of balancing intuition, insight and interpretation. As with sharpening a dull knife, it is necessary to grind away the corroded and superfluous matter which diminishes the edge of one's intellectual intensity. Reflective tools can cut through cognitive errors and get to a deeper appreciation of the nature of things as they are, in spite of what they may seem to be.

The more people rely upon generalization and assumption, without regard for their own intuition and insight, the more likely these latter capacities are to atrophy due to underuse. An evolutionary biologist might even speculate as to whether these essentially human traits could become as functionless as the vestigial wings on a turkey. The bird can flap and flutter, but it will never fly. Those with an underdeveloped intellectual capacity cannot rise above unreliable assumptions and unchallenged conventional wisdom. Observers lacking a sufficiently effective sensory mechanism for distinguishing between verifiable knowledge and spurious assumptions can misconstrue the very problems they mean to elucidate.

Technical, Practical and Emancipatory Knowledge

Jurgen Habermas differentiates between technical, practical and emancipatory knowledge (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 349), which correspond roughly to Stephan Brookfield's categorization of causal, prescriptive and paradigmatic assumptions. (Brookfield, 1995) Both

of these classifications can serve as useful tools for investigating the nature of behavior and the discrepancies between what people think or say they are doing and what they actually achieve.

Technical knowledge, according to Habermas, has to do with facts and functions, such as schedules, locations, and operations. This type of information can be verified through fact checking. Mass transit schedules, route maps, and assembly instructions, are all examples of information that can be easily verified. That part 'A' connects to part 'B,' for instance, can be ascertained in a set of directions provided by a manufacturer and then confirmed through the assembly process.

Causal assumptions explain how things work. Based in technical knowledge, they are the easiest to disprove with evidence and the most likely to be supplanted by more convincing explanations. Examples include any sort of consequence of an *assumed* cause and effect relationship. This sort of assumption is not dependent upon proven causality, but upon the plausibility of apparent causality, which may or may not be in effect.

Practical knowledge is constructed through meaningful communication. The difference between technical and practical knowledge is a matter of the difference between one person understanding information and two or more people understanding each other. People can understand, misunderstand or entirely miss the significance of a comment or an explanation, depending upon their ability to make sense of the information they receive.

Prescriptive assumption, Brookfield's second category, is loosely correlated to practical knowledge. Although the two are not entirely the same, they do share something essential in

common. Prescriptive assumptions, which reflect upon one's outlook as to how the order of things in the world ought to be, provide the background upon which understanding can be established. These assumptions may be based upon an unexamined opinion or belief that is thought to be a fact, and they provide a mechanism for interpreting interaction and formulating opinion. Understanding is established within the context of interpersonal communication and culturally defined patterns of behavior, systems which are commonly much more complex than may initially seem to be the case.

A recent mining incident provides an instructive example. Two factual occurrences transpired at approximately the same moment. A mine shaft collapsed in Utah, trapping six miners deep under ground, and a seismic reading of significant magnitude was recorded in the area. It was assumed by some observers that an earthquake caused the collapse of the mine shaft. "By the afternoon, University of Utah researchers were saying that it was the mine collapse that had caused the seismic activity. But they also said an earthquake could not be ruled out, the A.P. reported." (NYTimes.com, 2007) The owner of the mine insisted that an earthquake was the cause, suggesting that this random act of nature was responsible for an unpredictable and unavoidable tragedy. CBS News reported, however, that "Government mine inspectors have issued 325 citations against the Utah mine since January 2004, according to federal Mine Safety and Health Administration online records. Of those, 116 were what the government considered "significant and substantial," meaning they are likely to cause injury." (CBSNews.com, 2007) The owner, nevertheless, insisted that it was a safe coal mine. He "renewed his attacks on media coverage of the disaster and continued to insist

the collapse was caused by an earthquake, contradicting seismologists who said the cave-in itself was what registered a 3.9 magnitude.” (NPR, 2007) The mine owner was quoted as saying, “From our mining experience, we know this was an earthquake.” (NPR, 2007) The basis of his knowledge, and why he was confident in contradicting the scientists was not made clear in this particular report.

Had there been no seismic reading, it would seem that the collapse must have been caused by the mining activity. The introduction of seismic evidence suggested the occurrence of an earthquake. A review of the scientific data pointed toward the collapse registering as what appeared to be an earthquake. Appearances, evidence and data all support various possibilities, but do not offer conclusive proof. The data must be interpreted, and it remains to be seen if definitive causality can be established. Collecting additional information increases the plausibility of an evidence-based argument and highlights the fact that assumptions rely upon verisimilitude, rather than veracity, and they often reflect the interests of the postulating party.

Causal assumptions are supported by a tendency to rely upon the assumptions embedded in the structure of one’s understanding. The limited information in the early stage of the scenario indicated one convincing version of reality. Additional information changed the picture. Conflicting versions of the incident call attention to the need for analysing the situation in order to establish facts. Understanding the significance of concepts such as ‘acts of nature,’ ‘scientific evidence’ and the interests of the involved parties lead the observer to a more complex picture of the incident. “Discovering and investigating [causal assumptions] is

only the start of the reflective process. We must then try to find a way to work back to the more deeply embedded prescriptive and paradigmatic assumptions we hold.” (Brookfield, 1995a, par. 8)

Clarifying complexity is no simple matter. While the outcome of a given exchange could be a mutually agreed upon understanding, it could also be uncertain and at times even fraught with risk. This is because communication is often processed quickly and inadvertently, rather than deliberately, with thoughtful consideration. The meaningful dialogue that may be necessary to achieve mutual understanding can require a labor intensive process. As time is a limited resource, assumption is often the currency that facilitates efficient exchange of information between people—be it in day-to-day communication, public discourse or in a classroom, all of which serve as exchanges in the marketplace of ideas. An assumption may pass for knowledge or truth, but if it over simplifies reality, it has the effect of complicating, rather than clarifying a complex context. An unexamined assumption, to the extent that it is by definition an inexact approach to estimating the value of information, can facilitate either understanding or misunderstanding. If there is no assessment of the arguments which could affirm or discount an assumption, it cannot be concluded that an assumption has met the burden of proof. The longer assumptions go unexamined, the greater the possibility that layers of misunderstanding will accumulate and obscure the essential complexity of a context.

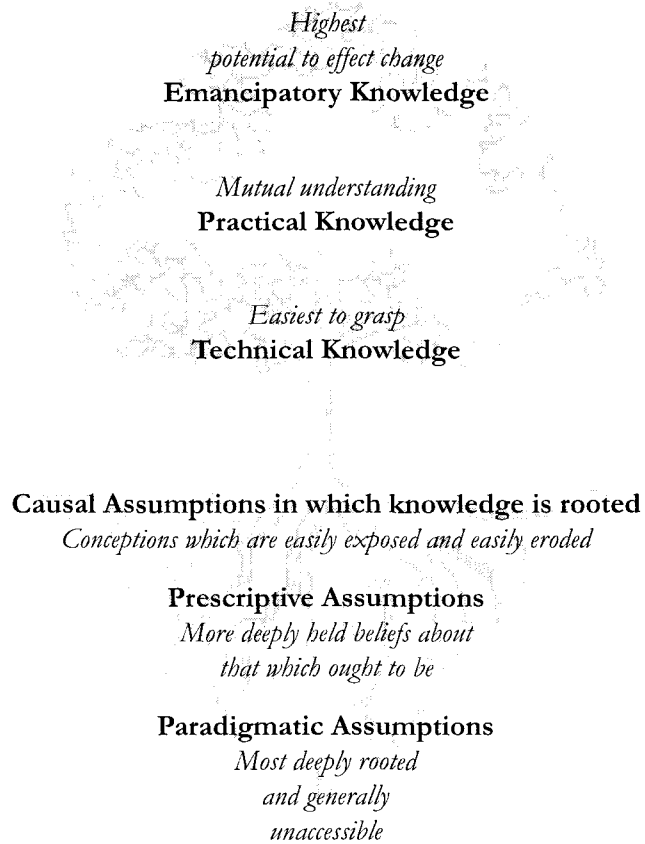
Paradigmatic assumptions are the most difficult to uncover. They are also the most likely to go unrecognized because people tend to consider their understandings of basic truth

about reality to be objectively valid. “Paradigmatic assumptions are examined critically only after a great deal of resistance ... and it takes a considerable amount of contrary evidence and disconfirming experiences to change them. But when they are challenged and changed, the consequences for our lives are explosive.” (Brookfield, 1995) Releasing the mind from the domination of specious paradigmatic assumptions amounts to intellectual emancipation from the shackles of ignorance.

Brookfield’s definition of paradigmatic assumptions, therefore, lends itself to correlation with Habermas’ reference to emancipatory knowledge, which concerns how it is that things are as they are, why they are that way, whose interests are being served by the existing state of affairs and how a situation could be different. Examples of emancipatory thinking include seeking to understand who influences and decides which issues will be addressed by elected officials, included in school curricula or covered on the news in various media outlets. Whose interests would be served by maintaining or changing political, economic, educational or journalistic policies and for whom would certain changes be beneficial? “Not all knowledge, then, serves the same interests, nor does all knowledge construction hold the same potential for challenging the status quo or emancipating the individual. Clearly emancipatory knowledge has the most power to address the oppressive forces in society.” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 349) One seeks to understand paradigmatic assumptions about the nature of power relationships in society through emancipatory knowledge.

This classification can be viewed as a tree of knowledge, where the low-hanging fruit are the bits of information obtained with little effort. Above that level are the fruits of

knowledge that require more effort and understanding to reach. High up on the tree, are those fruits that usually go unnoticed. People are less likely to be able to gain higher knowledge even if they try. The fruits are out of reach and obscured from plain sight, requiring a significant and sustained effort to seek out and grasp that which cannot easily be attained.



The Tree of Knowledge

Diagram 3

(Line drawing, Ripke, 2006, text by author)

The unapparent yet influential nature of assumption is indicative of the same sort of mysteriously permeating effects that cultural capital has upon human behavior in general, and upon the decision making process in particular. The variations of the social reproduction theory described in Part I offer possible explanations as to the formation of behavior and aspirations rooted in deeply internalized values, schemes of perception and actions which are subjective yet largely common to members of a group or a class, and which dispose individuals to think and act in certain ways. There are both individual and group assumptions that support beliefs in what people think they know. An assumption that is held in common could be even more difficult to identify, in that it may be quite difficult, if not impossible to trace the roots of one individual's thought back to the origin of an idea.

The tree of knowledge depicted above suggests that the roots of assumption are directly below the knowledge to which they have given rise. If this were so, one would need only look into one's own autobiography in order to understand one's assumptions. But reality is more complex. We share assumptions with the other members of the groups with which we are associated, and others in these groups belong to additional and possibly multiple overlapping communities, all of which are continuously importing, exporting and transporting ideas. The genesis of a particular assumption may seem like the closed system of a single tree, which is one defined organism growing in one specific place over an extended period of time, but the lifeline of an idea can also be more akin to a vegetable or a grass with a vast subterranean reproductive structure, a network of roots generating long runners and shoots that surface far afield. Some ideas, like some plants, grow quickly and

adapt over time in different vicinities, as they both influence and respond to the atmosphere where they appear.

Liberation from oppressive force, whether it is exercised through an influential person, a powerful institution or a compelling idea, is a process that can begin as an individual endeavor, but comes to broader fruition through social change. Learning to ascertain which assumptions are refutable and which are verifiable, is a matter of exploring the divide between common misconception and relatively rare acute awareness.

Experiential Learning: What Does it Mean to Know?

In terms of Habermas' aforementioned categorization of knowledge, attaining information might be limited to a technical or a practical task, while enabling a learner to construct meaning through understanding the significance of information within the context of his or her own experience is a matter of emancipatory knowledge. Experiential learning emphasizes the educative process as a means of *expanding one's capacity* to understand and one's capability to employ knowledge in real world settings. This sort of learning can be evaluated through exercises that require effective coping skills and problem solving. Content acquisition is one important element of learning, but an overemphasis on content can skew the process away from application and toward *filling one's mind to capacity* with subject matter that can be measured by testing for retention of the material.³

Experiential learning provides contextualized information and facilitates experiences

3 This differentiation reflects Freire's definitions of 'liberating education' and 'banking,' discussed on pages 27-29.

which enable the learner to employ creativity and critical thinking skills to cope with problem solving and to develop constructive relationships. Learning that is focused primarily or only on transmitting content defines attaining knowledge as a matter of amassing a larger database. Content oriented learning is an accumulative process, while experiential learning is an integrative process through which learners use the knowledge they acquire in order to construct meaningful understandings that can be applied to tasks which require independent judgement. Whereas content learning emphasizes testing individual retention, experiential learning emphasizes learning communities and tasks through which people can discover what they have the potential to become.

Experiential learning includes the process of grasping information, but it does not end in the teaching of a specific lesson or test preparation. It cannot be defined as 'informal,' in the sense that learning is spontaneous or coincidental. Experientially structured learning activities engage learners in using the knowledge they are developing. Methodologies may include elements of lecturing and discussion as well as dialogue, experimentation, collaboration, problem solving, and simulation exercises. Whether learning happens in a classroom, on field trips, during extra curricular activities or in a summer camp environment is less important than how the teaching and learning are conducted in any of these settings. These methodologies encourage learners to search for the answers they need to solve the problems with which they are faced and prepare them to cope with the sort of challenges they will face in society.

Experiential learning is ultimately a transformative process. It enables participants to

shift from a passive or a responsive learning mode to an active and responsible mode of critical thinking and problem solving. Jack Mezirow described the essence of experiential learning in adult education in the following manner:

A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. For some, any uncritically assimilated explanation by an authority figure will suffice. But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understanding is the cardinal goal of adult education. Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking. (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5)

These same principles can be applied by experiential educators to the education of adolescents, guiding young people into the transition from childhood into adulthood.

Experiential education enables the participant to actively engage in the process of learning to encounter diversity and to grapple with the difficulties they encounter. As Brookfield observes in his study of Habermas, “People need to experience the contradictions and tensions of democracy and to learn how to navigate through these while also learning the uncomfortable ontological truth that they are often unnavigable. Learning democracy is a matter of learning how to live with ambiguity and contingency as much as it is learning how to apply deliberative decision-making procedures.” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 1164) Brookfield has concluded that “the workings of democracy,” according to Habermas, “must be understood as a lifelong learning process in which learning to live with contingency and contradiction is of equal importance to learning a set of procedural arrangements.”

(Brookfield, 2005, p. 1166) Through their joint engagement in experiential learning, educators guide the participants in a process of preparing to be both lifelong analytical learners and active citizens in a democratic society.⁴ The following sections offer a conceptual underpinning of experiential pedagogical methodologies and techniques.⁵

While the acquisition of predetermined content is often a necessary stage in the learning process, a curriculum that is narrowly focused on reproducing required results also reinforces the transmission of culturally embedded assumptions. Experiential learning taps intrinsic motivation of the learner to gain knowledge through discovery. It actively supports scrutinizing assumptions and constructing nuanced understandings of the intricacies and ambiguities of complex ideas and scenarios. The focus on grasping an ever larger picture, rather than answering specific questions, aims to broaden the learners' understanding of problems and challenges, offering legitimacy to the idea of transforming society.

Even though memorizing and studying are experiences, the intention of experiential learning is that the experience itself be intrinsically meaningful, one that contributes to the learner being able to create his or her own authentic and useful knowledge. Unfamiliar activities can be disorienting, requiring much more than information for mastery. Humans,

4 This idea is at the heart of the education work in which I participated at Brandeis University's Genesis program. The following section is based upon material I wrote for the purpose of introducing new instructors at Genesis to our expectations regarding the nature of a Genesis course and for the purpose of establishing the basis of a common understanding of the collaborative process of curriculum design, in which I engaged with each instructor in my capacity as the senior educator.

5 In addition to the material presented in the remainder of this section, I have included in Appendix C, "The Culminating Project at Genesis," an explanation of the model according to which I worked with the instructors on developing culminating projects for their courses. These were collaborative endeavors initiated by the instructors, but then planned and implemented together with the participants in each course.

for instance, learn from birth to be comfortable and competent on dry land and are usually disoriented when first immersed in deep water, where walking and breathing are impossible. Suddenly, the simple act of putting one foot in front of the other and the reflexive routine of inhaling and exhaling can become life-threatening challenges. One could learn all about the physiology of swimming in a classroom, but one cannot learn to swim in a library or from a correspondence course. Only the experience of getting in the water and managing to stay afloat can provide the opportunity to learn how to swim. It is no coincidence that the expression “sink or swim” is a metaphor for demonstrating failure or competence in an endeavor. Experiential learning can provide a process of mediation between sinking and swimming by creating meaningful learning contexts through which learners become familiar with the sort of real-life tests they may face outside of educational frameworks.

Case Studies - Data alone may have little meaning, even if retention can be measured accurately. Case study learning is one way of providing a meaningful context. A case study is more than a story from which to cull the facts; learners investigate a situation in order to discover key issues and to suggest answers to questions or resolutions to the problems they identify. They can be much more engaged when they are in the act of investigation as opposed to the role of passively absorbing material given to them. In this way they create their own sense of the significance of the context. If the circumstances allow (time to complete the project, interest in the case, access to additional sources of information and methods for approaching the sources) they may go on to construct their own knowledge. At that point, assessment can no longer be limited to simply identifying correct or incorrect

answers to specific questions with fixed answers. It is entirely possible that a well-conducted case study will produce information about the case that is beyond the familiarity of the instructor. Assessment of case study learning examines aspects of the process such as the value of the questions posed in the investigation, adequacy of data collection, consistency of approach and ability to draw conclusions from the research. An investigator's personal agenda or preconceived notions that might overshadow or inform conclusions should also be subject to scrutiny.

Role Plays - A role-play attempts to build a bridge between gaining familiarity with something external to oneself and the authentic knowledge of personal experience. While it is not possible to truly become the person one studies for a role, it is possible to develop an emotional identification, empathy and vicarious insight into the feelings and motivation of the subject of the role-play. In order to do so, learners are encouraged to neutralize their own personalities and experiences in order to 'become' someone else.

Simulations - A simulation puts the participant to the test of playing the role under challenging and possibly even stressful conditions. An effective simulation motivates a participant to internalize an understanding of the subject, to the point of being able to act as a reasonable substitute for an authentic character. The complexity of a realistic simulation exercise, as opposed to a game that mocks the subject, requires that the role players function as the characters they have developed, respond in character during interaction with other role players, and arrive at outcomes that reflect the characters, their interests, motivations, limitations and the realities of the lives of their adopted persona. A simulation can be

considered a deeper form of learning, but not to the exclusion of the other methods. The success of a simulation depends upon a series of well-developed roles, each based in contextualized factual knowledge.⁶

Conclusion of Part I

Social reproduction is a matter of internalizing and passing on assumptions, perceptions and misperceptions. In order for culture to be reproduced, there must be both individual and collective mechanisms for transmitting and internalizing values. The ways in which people understand one another, both consciously and subliminally, constitute the collective practical knowledge held by those in a common social environment.

Precedents and preconceived notions are powerful elements of the process of cultural transmission, but they alone do not determine inevitable outcomes. A deterministic interpretation of society assumes the inevitable reproduction of social and distributive inequity, maintenance of the controlling interests of the powerful and continuous manipulation of individuals and groups in society that are in some way ignored, exploited, silenced or oppressed. The premise that human agency can be a major factor in determining the course of events in society, however, suggests that it is possible for individuals and

6 This explanation of experiential pedagogy is drawn from my experience in working with educators. I presented this content to new instructors at Genesis. They started out as learners becoming familiar with a new workplace. The planning process served as a real case study, regarding each course topic, as well as the development of an actual role, through which the professionals learned to be Genesis instructors. Coping with the pedagogical challenges that arose provided actual problem-solving scenarios for the experiential learning of the faculty members. Through our collaboration on these issues, we established small learning communities that served as the nuclei for the larger learning community that would be created in the framework of each course.

communities to become empowered to take responsibility for their direction in life. Those who enjoy the benefits of individual liberty and who have resources at their disposal can also learn to see the value in extending the rights and privileges they enjoy to members of their society who are relatively under-privileged.

Human agency can be an important factor in enhancing or diminishing the capacity of people to grasp meaning and impact the dynamic process of cultural transmission and transformation. Some of the forces that effect the transmission process are explicit, while other influences are underlying and elusive. Critical and reflective thinking can aide in the process of exposing and examining assumptions for the purpose of affirming or negating their validity. Individuals and societies require experiential learning and emancipatory thinking in order to move beyond assumptions that reinforce various forms of oppression.

It is reasonable to assume that most people will continue to rely upon their unreasoned assumptions and their unexamined thought processes, faulty though they may be. No evidence points to a strong probability that all of humanity will become increasingly reflective and focused primarily on thoughtful problem solving rather than confrontation and competition for limited resources. Still, since people generally live within the cultural norms to which their society has adapted, it is possible for those individuals who have a natural inclination for understanding problems to assert their leadership in teaching problem-solving as a culturally valued idea. Success in this endeavour may not entirely change the way of the world, but it can have an effect upon the way many people experience the world.

Insofar as social reproduction is a function of cultural transmission, solutions to problematic conditions that are propagated through the transmission process are to be found in transformation of culture. Part II of this investigation focuses on an analysis of the transmission of culture and the nature of cultural transformation. It provides a case study of transformation, including examples of the purposeful reinterpretation of venerated texts in order to promote emancipatory values in place of assumptions that legitimize oppression.

Part II: Toward a Cultural Context for Emancipatory Education

Introduction to Part II

The second part of this investigation is an examination of cultural context and the collectively held paradigms that facilitate the embedding of assumptions regarding power, position, privilege and possibility in social and cultural consciousness. I begin with the question of the meaning of emancipatory education for people who are not oppressed in any explicit manner. I focus in particular on the sort of population that was characteristic of the program where I conducted the in-service professional development program discussed in Part III. I then examine the issue of cultural transformation, and conclude with two text studies of Jewish sources, looking at the way in which the ideas of oppression and liberation are taught and could be taught in the future.

I focus upon the cultural milieu with which I am most familiar for the purpose of illustration. The applicability of this investigation, however, is not limited by a given cultural milieu. All practical work has a locality, but the extent of its relevance is not necessarily delineated by the boundaries of a particular place or by the parameters of a specific population. The approach to understanding the evolution of cultural contexts and the ways in which it is possible to affect that process could be adopted by anyone and adapted for any community, with respect to its particular history and cultural heritage. The ideas presented here are more universal than particular, even if they are filtered through my cultural context.

People in multi-cultural societies contribute to the whole as members of sub-groups, or

communities. They can, of course, be members of multiple and overlapping communities, with shared texts and rituals, which further promotes the continual adaptation of culture. Just as we learn to identify simultaneously as members of a family and members of a community, we can also identify with multiple communities. As Michael Walzer put it, “Engaged men and woman tend to be multiply engaged.” (Walzer, 1992, p. 11) Writing specifically of the United States, he refers to the twinned American values of a singular citizenship that encompasses a radically pluralist civil society. (Walzer, 1992, p. 17) Within this society, various ethnic and religious cultures have become Americanized, but not totally assimilated in the metaphorical melting pot. (Walzer, 1992, p. 18)

All selves are self-divided (internally differentiated) in three different ways.... First, the self divides itself among its interests and its roles; it plays many parts... The self is a citizen, parent, worker or professional or merchant, teacher or student, doctor or patient, and so on, defining itself in terms of its responsibilities, qualifications, skills and entitlements. And, second, the self divides itself among its identities; it answers to many names, defining itself now in terms of its family, nation, religion, gender, political commitment, and so on. It identifies itself with different histories, traditions, rituals holidays, and, above all, with different groups of other people, incorporated, as it were, into a wider selfhood.... [T]hird, the self also divides itself among its ideals, principles, and values; it speaks with more than one moral voice—and that is why it is capable of self-criticism and prone to doubt, anguish and uncertainty.... making the self a wonderfully complex identity. (Walzer, 1994, p. 85)

So, individual identities are likely to be more complex than they seem, and sub-cultures are likely to be less separated from one another than might appear to be the case. Cultural influences cross social boundaries. Members of different religious communities, for instance, might find themselves to be members of the same workplace or school community. The particular experiences of various individuals may well influence the nature of their common

community. In turn, the common experiences are likely to influence the nature of their separate communities.

The following diagram is the “Speculation” region of Diagram 2, the complete version of which appears in the format section of the introduction. This part of the whole depicts the three sections in Part II and the interrelationships between them, wherein each of the following sections effects and is effected by the others. Section 2.1 provides an explanation of the process of cultural transmission and transformation. This characteristic of human society is a manifestation of the mechanism which provides continuity with valued and venerated elements of a culture. Section 2.2 deals with the the possibility of change within the context of cultural renewal. Section 2.3 provides a case study of cultural clarification and reinterpretation of familiar cultural themes in a manner that promotes an emancipatory message. Change can viewed as moving away from the familiar, or it can be understood to be moving nearer to the essential core of the values transmitted within an evolving cultural identity.

II. Speculation:

*The Possibility
of Change*

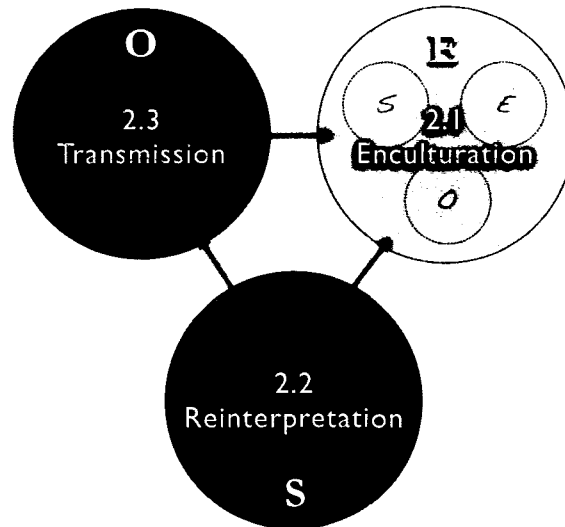


Diagram 2, Part II

2.1) Culture as a Dialectical Process

Culture, referring to products in the arts and other areas of human achievement, is the result of a process which creates a sense of dynamic continuity through a synthesis of the forces of preservation and change. The process is at times largely inadvertent, while at other times it can be highly influenced through purposeful action of one or more interested parties. Even resistance to change contributes to a type of transformation when those invested in preservation of their understandings and their practices develop a character of opposition or intransigence.

Culture is shaped through a continual process of growth through accommodation to the prevailing conditions in shared environments. Divergent cultural influences often characterise the same public sphere, bringing about both intentional and unintentional

instances and patterns of convergence. Explicit and subtle conflicts reach resolutions, producing new oppositional relationships to be resolved in the same dynamic manner. Subcultures in an open multicultural society are affected by influences that accelerate the pace of change. Opposition and accommodation occur in three patterns or degrees of commonality: convergence, intersection or exclusivity.

In the United States, for example, everyone shares the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and other texts that contribute to the common ethos and national aspirations. Even though these texts are subject to interpretation, there is convergence regarding what the texts are, who wrote them and how, for instance, the Constitution is to be interpreted by the Supreme Court. This provides the highest level of commonality, even as people can debate what it is they hold in common and how it should be interpreted.

The Bible offers an example of intersection. It is a text (or a series of texts) that is shared in a wide variety of ways by the large majority of Americans. By 'sharing,' I do not mean that everyone agrees about what it is that they have in common. All would agree, however, that there are elements of commonality among the many millions of adherents to various religious and cultural groups that see the Bible as being somehow connected to the development of their worldview, even though they do not share a unified worldview. Indeed, questions such as what the Bible means to people in different communities, which texts are included in it, understandings regarding the authorship of the texts and their interpretations are some of the most contentious issues in American society. Nevertheless, while interpretations of texts vary widely among members of different communities, the biblical

narrative provides common ground for the testing and contesting of the widely divergent ideas that are central to the identities of many Americans.

Difference and diversity, however, are not always matter of conflict. In some cases, convergence leads to embracing elements of commonality. The story of the liberation of the slaves in Egypt is the story of the People of Israel, written in Hebrew, but it was obviously not a story that was limited to them. African-American slaves, for instance, sang freedom songs based in the biblical texts of the Christian religion they adopted after being forcibly imported as property to the Western Hemisphere. In spite of the essential tension between the Europeans who voluntarily immigrated to the Western Hemisphere and the African slaves who arrived in shackles, the biblical exodus of the Hebrews offers an emancipation narrative that resonates strongly in different ways for many culturally disparate groups of Jews and Christians. The African influence would later have an impact upon the Jews. During the civil rights movement of the mid-Twentieth Century, Negro spirituals would be included in Passover ceremonies, when Jews retold their own historical narrative. The foundation of emancipatory learning is strengthened by members of different cultural groups bringing experiences from a variety of settings to the shared contexts in which they live and learn.

There are also texts that are exclusive to sub-cultures within the larger society, which are generally foreign to the those outside of the sub-group. In addition to the books of the Bible read by the Jews and others, for instance, there are also many legalistic texts and moralistic tales that are specific to Jewish culture. Meanwhile, Christians culture developed the books

of the New Testament, which are included in their version of the Bible. The Book of Mormon is exclusively significant to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and so on. Similar divisions exist beyond the confines of religious differences, in the realms of language, music, politics and more. A particular cultural milieu might cut across religious lines according to political affiliations, while people who live in separate areas, divided by class or ethnic lines might find themselves to be lovers of the same music or members of the same religious denomination. Cultural milieu, then, is not a matter of fixed entities or clear cut content, but rather of overlapping identities and allegiances, including both commonality and exclusivity, if not subtle or outright contention.

Various modes of cultural transmission and transformation operate simultaneously, although not all are necessarily ascendent or even discernable at any given time. The complex process of cultural adaptation occurs within the tension between preservation and innovation, which is characterized by some combination of deliberative clarification and inadvertent alteration in response to incidental influences. The following five categories clarify the concurrent forces at work in the evolution of culture. *Replication* and *qualification* generally promote preserving the legacy of the past. *Clarification* focuses on reorienting and redefining cultural legacy. *Rejection and coercion* have the effect of uprooting one's heritage and supplanting it with alternate ideas. The borders between the categories are fluid, and multiple influences are likely to be at work at any given time.

Replication is the purposeful or inadvertent attempt to maintain the highest level of continuity with past experience. A religious ceremony, for instance, may be seen as an

example of people attempting to maintain a tradition by replicating a ceremony they perceived to be meaningful or obligatory. Minor modifications may be applied over time, but the original text or practice remains readily identifiable and is characterized by essentially the same qualities.

Qualification is a process through which additional layers of meaning are added to reflect changing values or modes of behavior. The celebration of George Washington's birthday, for example, is a longstanding tradition. Stories about the first U.S. president and his legacy are taught to school children in order to reinforce values, such as bravery, perseverance and honesty. In recent years, due to changing sensibilities in society, the discussion of Washington as a slave owner has also been raised. In this manner, contemporary values are inserted in order to qualify the continuance of a tradition, while the founding president is still honored as the father of the nation.

Clarification is a an intentional process through which people examine ideas and reassess the meaning they ascribe to a certain text, ritual or act. Like the clarification of liquefied butter using heat to separate the essential substance from impurities that float to the top, cultural clarification, through study and reflection, can further define (or redefine) the essence of a text or a behavior according to a certain interpretation. Medieval Islamic, Jewish and Christian theologians such as Ibn Khaldun, Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas, for instance, incorporated Aristotelian philosophy into their traditions. By applying the principals of philosophical inquiry to their study of Scripture, they separated the narrative of simple stories from what they identified as the essential wisdom of their revealed texts. It

could be argued that Moses Ben Maimon's medieval conception of the Divine was essentially the same as that of the biblical Moses Ben Amram, but by introducing elements considered foreign to their traditions and adopting them as essential aspects of their own systems of belief and jurisprudence, religious philosophers of the Middle Ages were actively redefining their cultures. Whether philosophical inquiry is extrinsic to Scripture or the intrinsic nature of its very essence remains a matter of interpretation, but for the purpose of this illustration, it is important to understand that the pioneers resolving these divergent modes of thought articulated their innovations in terms of clarifying existing understandings, rather than in terms of superseding the long-standing authority of their venerated texts.

Rejection constitutes a clear break with an element or elements of tradition, either through active renunciation or through intentional neglect. Even if the rejection exists within an overall attempt to maintain some level of continuity, it is not presented merely as reinterpretation, but as redefinition with the intent of establishing a degree of separation from traditionally accepted beliefs or practices. Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation is an example of a leader claiming the authority to both change the laws of the nation in order to reject an accepted practice, and yet to remain faithful to his commitment to uphold the constitution. Lincoln was perhaps also *clarifying* the Bill of Rights and extending its reach to its logical conclusion.⁷

Coercion, the final element, may be either active or passive. Forced conversions, conquests

⁷ Lincoln's position on the institution of slavery seems to have been inconsistent. As such, it reflected the prolonged process of cultural transformation regarding attitudes about race in U.S. history.

and crusades are the most obvious examples. Assimilation without the use of overt force is also a subtle form of succumbing to coercion. Some forced restrictions or imposed obligations do not necessarily indicate a negative development. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was an example of instituting change in the United States by forcing a break with the past. Even though the law was enacted against the will of some of the people, this political maneuver was a catalyst for cultural change in a society where legal discrimination was still commonplace a century after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Everyone influences the process of cultural transmission through their behavior, be it through purposeful decision making or due to their inadvertent actions. In each case, the directions people take may reflect elements of both continuity and discontinuity. Contradictory forces influence every culture at any given time. Consciously employing and responding to the elements of transmission described above, with the intention of gaining a deep understanding of the forces at work in a society, can enable individuals and groups to more effectively influence the process of change. People can learn to pose problems and to become problem solvers in order to cope with the challenges they face.

It stands to reason that heightened intentionality can either bring about a greater sharing of responsibility, or it could contribute to conflicts between people who become committed to very different conclusions regarding their perceptions of social issues. It is not necessary or even desirable for all people to reach the same conclusions through subjective reflection, but it is possible to encounter diversity through dialogue rather than to experience it as adversity. An awareness of this potential can reinforce a tolerant and pluralistic world

outlook by promoting an understanding that human endeavor can be enhanced through both honest evaluation of personal experience and through openness to understanding foreign ideas in order to avoid contributing to ideological intransigence. Endowing young people with a cultural identity that values liberty, equity, social responsibility, and the cultivation of ideas, encourages the development of willful individuals who may ultimately re-imagine their communities and actively contribute to creating a world in which they would prefer to live.

2.2) Pedagogy of the Privileged

The elements of my educational work detailed in Part III were conducted with experienced educators working with highly motivated, college-bound high school students. Unlike the environment in which Paolo Freire gained his essential experience working with illiterate adults, the population with which I worked could be generally categorized as coming from backgrounds ranging from non-poor to privileged. Most, if not all of them grew up in families rich in social and cultural capital, even if some of them did not come from homes that would be considered financially wealthy.⁸ These are people who stand to benefit from the socio-economic structure of a society which rewards academic degrees and reinforces the cultural capital of the highly educated. Teaching adolescents who choose to

8 I did not collect data on the socio-economic status of the Genesis participants. This generalization is based upon the fact that the large majority came from families that were able to pay for at least a significant portion of the program tuition. Many also had the connections and the commitment to find additional funding grants. It is entirely likely that some of the participants went to great lengths to earn part of the tuition or apply for additional outside grants, but the fact that they participated in a university-based summer enrichment program was itself indicative of the social and cultural capital of the participants and their families.

spend their summers exploring culture, artistic fields and intellectual disciplines at an elite university summer program could be considered pedagogy of the privileged.

The participants as well as the faculty members and educational staff are subtly if not acutely aware that participating in a university summer enrichment program contributes to their becoming even more well-positioned to avail themselves of the privileges accorded to those who are associated with fine academic institutions, be they financial or the sort of fungible cultural capital they are poised to appreciate. The educators with whom I worked are all university graduates, almost all of them pursuing or having obtained graduate degrees from prestigious institutions of higher learning. So, what does all this concern for oppression and the oppressed have to do with them? What would motivate adolescents and young professionals such as these to adopt a critical perspective on society?

Growing up in comfort, they are likely insulated from the poverty and deprivation of the less fortunate. In a sense, these young people and their educators are part of a risk group. If they are convinced that the system works for them, it may seem reasonable to conclude that the alternative is being one of the unfortunate who work for minimum wage, if they work at all, for whom the government provides public housing, welfare, insufficient health care, and on and on. One might assume that they would place themselves in opposition to the underprivileged, yet the idea of learning to become sensitive to the disadvantaged resonates in the minds of many in the program. Social consciousness is an element of the attraction to participate in the Genesis program at Brandeis University. The promotional material, for instance, includes this passage:

Social action and justice are deeply rooted in the traditions of Judaism, Brandeis University and Genesis. Find the places where education and action co-exist. Work with activists, artists, and community leaders on different causes and approaches to social action. Each week, join in community service on campus or in Waltham. The notion of *Tikun Olam* - repairing the world - is central to all we do at Genesis. (Brandeis University's Genesis Program, 2007)

The pedagogy and curricula for the courses are also designed to support this approach, with educators leading small groups of participants through complex, compelling topics that combine disciplines and challenge assumptions about the social order.

Helping them to become reflective learners and teachers can prepare them to see the potential for creating a system with more humanizing options, one in which they can contribute to creating an increasingly just society. Instructors responded well to the suggestion of developing themes of social justice within their courses. The educators enthusiastically planned meaningful experiences to engage the participants intellectually and practically, both on and off campus. The participants responded positively to evaluation questions about community service, and the culminating presentations of the classes, planned and presented by the participants, often included elements of their courses which dealt with issues such as class, poverty, gender, diversity, access and sustainability.

Martin Buber offered a keen differentiation (Buber, 1958) between self-serving 'elitists' and the members of a 'genuine elite,' having been called to their central function and loyal to their duty to society rather than to themselves. He also observed that the weight of this challenge might not be borne by the inner strength and stability of a given community. Reinforcing such values, creating positive and meaningful experiences in doing so and

learning within the realm of emancipatory knowledge (that is, understanding why things are the way they are, how they got that way, whose interests are being served and what could be different), is at the heart of the prophetic message in Jewish tradition. Neither the elected nor the self-selected are granted the right to become self-serving. If they are to avoid doing so, they need to understand and experience the value of a noble purpose which provides a kind of satisfaction that is not predicated upon self-indulgence.

In their study on Jewish youth programming, H. A. Alexander and Ian Russ have asserted that “idealism calls upon the young person to give up some of his or her needs to serve some nobler cause.” (Alexander & Russ, 1992 p. 91) They cited John Dewey, who observed in *Democracy and Education* that “although it is necessary for a culture to train youngsters to follow certain prescribed canons of behavior, it is also necessary that they be taught how to criticize the very values and traditions in which they are being instructed. Without this potential for criticism, informal education can become routinized and cultish.” (Alexander & Russ, 1992 p. 92) Encouraging young people to think critically about their communities, values and traditions may seem counter-productive to building a strong identification among members of a community, but critical engagement does not contradict connectedness or negate loyalty. According to their application of Erikson’s theory of emotional, social, and cognitive development, semi-autonomous youth culture is not usually characterized by significant rebellion against adult society. “[They] will sometimes rebel against adult authority and at other times welcome it.” (Alexander & Russ, 1992 p. 90) Critical engagement is not a matter of opposition, but rather a position between extremes,

from which to observe and investigate a culture and one's complex relationship to it.

At one extreme, a noncritical allegiance sustains the tendency to assume and accept that matters simply are as they seem, and perhaps even that they are somehow meant to be that way, regardless of any evidence that indicates a contradiction between espoused values and the manner in which they are practiced. A disengaged critical response, at the other extreme, is by nature in an adversarial position, from which one's goal would be to reinforce a position of opposition. Either of these overriding tendencies could preclude a sound clarification of any given situation. Critical engagement is a position that straddles the divide between the preservation of one's heritage and a commitment to change.

The essential tension between these two poles can be mitigated by legitimizing social criticism based in a commitment to common values, rather than a reflexive sanctification of a common past. Cultivating a commitment to learn from the past and to move toward the future in the spirit of emancipatory values is a process of intentional clarification. The question of what to preserve and what to change is prioritized over any ideological or theological commitment to replication of all that was held sacred or dominant because of its status in the past. A commitment to influencing the ongoing evolution of culture and society is a world outlook that reflects the vision of the socially critical biblical prophets. It is a perspective that promotes the dialectical processes of cultural transformation while still allowing for continuity with key elements of a proudly held tradition.

2.3) The Transformation of Culture

Religious Humanism

Religious communities can provide a sense of belonging and meaning that gives people the strength to persevere in times of adversity. This strength may enable them to overcome oppression. Alternatively, a faith community focused on a world beyond the confines of daily life might merely serve to enable people to tolerate oppression more successfully or even reinforce the idea that people are somehow deserving of their lot. Religious tradition is, after all, the foundation upon which some adherents build a conservative world outlook. This is one logical outcome of religious influence, given the self-preserving nature of many religious institutions. Religions tend to develop institutional structures designed to further social and/or political agendas. They exert influence over the personal lives of their adherents and attempt to maintain some level of control over the public sphere. This establishes a certain sensibility and provides a sense of stability.

Social change is either resisted or tolerated, but rarely encouraged by a religious establishment. Institutional power that is supported by the acceptance of a vision of enduring Truth as revealed by Divine authority and mediated through a social elite does not easily lend itself to open criticism or alternative leadership. The struggle for emancipation from corruption and authoritarian rule, however, has also provided the impetus for religious protest movements that break with tradition and call for change. Spiritual motivation can also be a catalyst. It need not serve to make poverty tolerable or make injustice seem justifiable. Complex ideas that address seemingly insurmountable problems can be anchored

in the lives of common people and their communities. Educators can teach familiar texts and rituals emphasizing interpretations with a commitment to social change.

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States provide instructive examples of secular documents that brought both theological and philosophical ideas into the public sphere in the service of a struggle for human emancipation. When it became “necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another,” Thomas Jefferson and the supporters of independence for the American colonies declared “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted.” (Jefferson, 1776, par. 2) The framers of the Constitution of the United States of America eventually came to a consensus regarding the collective responsibilities required “in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty,” (Constitution, 1787, par. 1) which they did by establishing their legal system.

These two documents, one that signaled the beginning of a revolution for freedom and another that established the way that liberty would be realized in the new system, constitute the basis for the civil religion of American society. These venerated texts, products of the sort of social criticism that Thomas Paine detailed in *Common Sense*, together with the accompanying narrative of the time, create an authoritative story. The stories of that period, such as the rage that led to the Boston tea party, Paul Revere’s daring ride, and Washington

heroically crossing the Delaware reinforce and justify the idea that it was necessary to dissolve one system and to create another in order to “secure the Blessings of Liberty.”

Given the abundance of liberation stories in both historical and mythological records, it is evident that a moral obligation to mitigate the negative effects of power and to struggle for emancipation from oppression are characteristic of human behavior. So, it seems, is the struggle between these opposing forces. The conception of liberation as a force of social justice is drawn from both secular and religious contexts. It is possible to draw upon both political theory and religious theology to create syntheses that reflect ancient conceptions of justice as well as modern notions of social change.

John Dewey integrated his deep-rooted Christian beliefs into his secular life, (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 481) which he combined to create a humanistic social theology. His vision of the community school as a vehicle for creating a democratic society was a belief he held with religious conviction. In his words, “The next religious prophet who will have a permanent and real influence on men’s lives will be the man who succeeds in pointing out the religious meaning of democracy, the ultimate religious value to be found in the normal flow of life itself. It is the question of doing what Jesus did for his time.” (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 1) Dewey’s formula for understanding and promoting the process of social change integrated humanistic and theistic components.

We who now live are parts of a humanity that extends into the remote past, a humanity that has interacted with nature. The things in civilization we prize most are not ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and

more generally shared than we have received it. Here are the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind. It remains to make it explicit and militant. (Dewey, 1934, p. 87)

According to Dewey's world view, community schools and the educational process serve as the focal point of the effort to bring about social change. His concept of the school as the social center asserts that a school should be a place where children learn both what it means to be democratic citizens and what they need to know in order to function as independent contributing members of society.

Identifying a 'common faith of mankind' of the sort envisioned by Dewey, making it explicit and militant requires a practical program and some sort of institutional framework to promote its values. Steven C. Rockefeller suggests that Dewey's rejection of institutional religion prevented him from fully exploring the potential contribution of religious life to the cultivation of democratic values in society.

[Dewey's] criticisms of the exclusivism and divisiveness generated by many traditional institutional religions is certainly justified. However, in many human beings there is a natural impulse to express their religious feelings in rituals with symbols. In religious rituals, social and moral as well as aesthetic and mystical sensitivities are at work. Furthermore, religious rituals may under the right circumstances intensify a person's religious consciousness. Dewey did not wish to deny this, but he did not explore fully the ritual aspect of the religious life as a natural mode of expression and sharing and the ways in which it may become part of the democratic life. (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 539)

Although he left organized religion, the idea of universal justice embedded in his definition of democracy shares common roots with the social discipline he came to reject.

Robert B. Westbrook refers to Dewey's 'barely Christian social gospel' which held that "it is

in Democracy, the community of ideas and interests through community of action, that the incarnation of God in man (man, that is to say, as organ of universal truth) becomes a living, present thing, having its ordinary and natural sense.” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 35-36) Dewey was part of a tradition of social criticism that found its expression through religious meaning. His humanistic understanding of virtue had a decidedly Christian emphasis, (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 484) but because he rejected the self-preserving nature of clerical hierarchies, his personally clarified faith was decidedly lacking in commitment to institutional religion.

Dewey believed that great ethical and social ideals, without a supernatural element, are equal to a religious quality of life. Intelligence and social relations rather than mysticism are central to Dewey’s religious philosophy. (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 511) God, according to Dewey’s interpretation, is a symbolic device for equal justice, human freedom and well-being. Dewey saw the realization of those values and the expression of his faith in furthering the development of democracy. (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 520) He was dedicated to pursuing the divine qualities of life and had faith in human potential to promote the process of unifying the ideal and the actual. (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 519)

Pedagogy, according to Dewey, is at the heart of the democratic process and democracy is an essential quality of education. “In the final account, then, not only does social life demand teaching and learning for its own permanence, but the very process of living together educates.” (Dewey, 1944, p. 6) The practice of education and participation in the community become indistinguishable. A critical understanding of the way in which self-serving political, social and religious élites dominate power relationships in society is

necessary in order to begin to counteract the authority of the institutions and the educational settings which suppress the development of the democratic and pluralist faith to which Dewey pointed. His religiously influenced pedagogy that fosters independent thinking from a young age is a recipe for creating a critically educated, democratic adult society.

Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the American movement for Reconstructionism in Judaism, developed a theology that was highly influenced by John Dewey's naturalistic philosophy. He was an active proponent of intentional cultural transformation, but unlike Dewey, Kaplan worked within religious institutions to promote his vision of social change. His writings on the nature of Judaism as an evolving civilization offer a conceptual underpinning for making intentional choices that are consistent with a scientific world outlook, yet maintain an essential continuity with an ancient tradition.

Kaplan considered Judaism to be an evolving civilization, the essence of which he characterized as ethical nationhood. (Kaplan, 1970, p. 204) He called for 'transposing' Judaism to the 'key of naturalism' and 'the key of humanism,' redefining which elements are essential and which others, such as miracles, the wrath of an anthropomorphic God, and Divine reward or punishment were merely employed as didactic literary devices of an earlier era. The Creator, according to Kaplan, does not function through supernatural intervention, but only within nature as an eternally creative force actuating humans to self-fulfillment. His "method of evolutionary adjustment" is a matter of "conserving from the past whatever of intrinsic value transcends the vicissitudes of circumstance and synthesizing it with whatever in the present is of ultimate concern." A central element of Kaplan's transition to naturalism

and humanism is his dismissal of the notion of the Jews as a chosen people. (Kaplan, 1970, pp. 49, 182) This rejection of a central aspect of biblical interpretation constitutes a rupture with traditional Judaism, within his overall attempt to maintain continuity with the past.

The Jewish tradition must be restated in terms of the scientific world outlook. As handed down from a pre-scientific era, that tradition is in conflict with scientific thought. Hence it is necessary to recognize as products of the popular imagination all those elements that cannot be maintained as historic fact. ... Folklore and legend, properly understood, are the repositories of implied historical truth and fundamental values which have authenticity and permanent worth. The usages, which in the tradition are conceived as divine commandments, should be treated as human institutions, laws and mores intended to help man achieve salvation. (Kaplan, 1970, p. 183)

According to Kaplan, the image of a God that actively monitors human behavior, purposefully intercedes on behalf of those he favors and punishes their enemies is a human creation. While he promoted a radically different theology than was accepted by mainstream Orthodoxy, he was also concerned about the passive erosion of Jewishness through voluntary assimilation, and he decried the Jewish illiteracy of acculturated American Jews and their lay leaders. Rejecting both isolation and assimilation, Kaplan advocated an active and committed integration into American society at the same time that he called for the reintroduction of rigorous Jewish education in order to provide a basis for a Jewish identity that could serve as a counterbalance to the allure of the majority American culture. (Kaplan, 1970, p. 137)

Kaplan contributed to the establishment of a uniquely American brand of Jewish culture, with his vision of a minority community that would be both highly integrated and yet meaningfully distinct from the majority. Reconstructions, or reinterpretations of the legacy

of Jewish culture are not, however, unique to Kaplan's theology or to modern Judaism. The Israeli scholar, Efraim Shmueli, traced the annals of Jewish history, differentiating between seven periods, which he defined as successive cultural systems, each arising after the downfall of its predecessor according to a new constellation of circumstances.

Culture, according to Shmueli, is "a set of shared symbols which represent an organized collective attempt to express the meaning, or meanings, of life and to make the world habitable by transforming its impersonal vastness and frightening dimensions into an understandable and significant order. Through culture, a chaotic and opaque environment becomes a meaningful world." (Shmueli, 1990, p. 3) The history of the People of Israel "has been a dramatic arena of conflicts and accommodations, of controversies partly settled, often left unresolved, of fundamental contradictions in beliefs, valuations and opinions, all of which brought about change that eventually forged entire cultures which were distinct from one another in substance as in style." (Shmueli, 1990, p. 11)

Each cultural system is characterized by three principal tensions: between universalism and particularism, between the individual and the nation, and among the elements that constitute each culture, such as language, land, ritual, economics and military institutions. (Shmueli, 1990, p. 113)

"The idea of Jewish history as a series of successive renaissances, or restorations, views the core of Jewish cultures as a meeting-ground between history and theology where the restatements of religious constructs became strategies for defending and preserving Jewish life and its significant meanings. ... Although the Jewish people cultivated its distinction and uniqueness, there were also powerful drives toward assimilation." (Shmueli, 1990, p. 7)

There are ruptures, changes so significant that the adherents of a previous culture would not understand the major literary works of their successors, but there is also dialectical continuity.

Shmueli traced the periodization of ruptures and the patterns of continuity through the repeated process of each culture developing its own understanding of the nature of being and its own system of meaning. The ancient biblical culture, which lasted until approximately 200 BCE, was the foundation of all subsequent variations of Judaic thought. The Talmudic culture dominated Jewish life after the fall of the second temple (70 CE) until the Arab conquests of the seventh century. The Poetic-Philosophic culture reached its height in the middle ages. The Mystical culture evolved through the 1700s. The Rabbinic culture attempted to make a unified meaning of its four predecessors. The culture of Jewish emancipation, beginning in the seventeenth century, manifested itself more broadly in the nineteenth century, and the National-Israeli culture conceived by Zionist thinkers of the Hebrew renaissance in the Nineteenth Century came to fruition in the twentieth century, with the founding of the modern State of Israel.

The first five cultures were religiously oriented systems of meaning. The innovating leaders of each perceived themselves as links in a chain of transmission that began with Moses receiving the Divine message on Mt Sinai. They described the changes they instituted as further elucidation of the true meaning of the sources of Judaism, stressing continuity and embedding their innovations in the framework of the authoritative texts of their predecessors. The latter two cultures are characterized by their eagerness to break with

tradition, denying the authority of the past to define the borders of their reinterpretation. This shift from formulating new interpretations while claiming to be faithful to the teachings of past generations to an emphasis upon bringing about a legitimate revolution in Jewish thought and practice reflected a prevalent intellectual orientation in European culture, when change became a desirable “superordinating concept in the self-conception of modern man.” (Shmueli, 1990, p. 237)

Shmueli identified five types of biblical reinterpretation employed in the various cultures. (1) Reconstruction⁹ is the attempt to understand the intention of the text as it had been conceived by the author. (2) Creative-construction is the attempt to correct the underlying assumptions of the text according to the underlying assumption of another culture. (3) The destructive approach is the attempt to subvert the meaning of a text through conscious distortion. (4) The critical-scientific approach is the modern attempt to neutralize the underlying cultural assumptions of the material and to conduct objective textual analysis in order to understand the culture which is reflected in a text. (5) Shmueli suggested that his own comparative-perspectivist approach is an extension of the scientific method. He strived to employ elements of all of the previous systems and aims to study not only the texts, but also the various cultures, how they viewed themselves and how they viewed each other. (Shmueli, 1990, p. 43-45)

After describing the long process of repeated cultural adaptations that the people of Israel

⁹ The use of the term ‘reconstruction’ in this instance is not directly associated with Kaplan or contemporary Reconstructionist Judaism.

underwent for thousands of years, Shmueli's historical analysis of the history of the People of Israel ends with his examination of modern Israel and the rift between the religiously orthodox and the secular Israelis who are engaged in an entrenched struggle for cultural hegemony in a society that grew out of the succession of previous cultures which continuously reinterpreted their collective past. He notes that the Jewish world was always susceptible to numerous conflicting currents from within and from without, and he offers his 'modern historical perspectivism' as a foundation for an identity rooted in "the nation's vast and complex cultural heritage" within which the contemporary Jew acts "both as an inheritor and as a legator." (Shmueli, 1990, p. 250)

This response to modernity is a way to counteract the "collapse of faith in the sacredness of tradition, in order that our past may not be divorced from our present." (Shmueli, 1990, p. 251) This shift requires a commitment to preserve what had previously been guarded by the sanctity of commandments. A voluntary Jewish identity replaces religious authority with a moral responsibility to continue the cultural legacy of the Jewish People. Shmueli pointed to a need for a new balance that could retain the creative elements of the past, yet promote change based in reinterpretation. The continuity is not complete, but neither is the rupture a destruction of the bonds that tie Jews to their history.

Can a culture survive a collapse of faith in the sanctity of commandments, do away with conceptions of institutional as well as Divine authority and still maintain itself as a framework for promoting social and moral responsibility? Each of the successive cultures Shmueli identified in his periodization were characterized by the nature of their biblical

interpretation. The examples in the following section clarify how the Bible can be read as a compelling narrative of the authority of reason, in a time when most Jews reject the institutional authority of any religious establishment.

Interpreting Exodus: A Case Study in the Transition and Transmission of Values

This section offers answers to the following three questions:

1) *How might contemporary Jewish culture constitute itself within a characteristic relationship with biblical literature?* Much can be revealed about the potential of human agency through study of the biblical narrative and integration of ancient ideas into the analysis of contemporary society, regardless of whether or not the text reveals the active presence of Divine authority.

2) *How can a commitment to learning Torah be maintained in light of prevalent ideas in Western societies to which many Jews subscribe, which contradict, or exist outside of the traditional commitment to religious law?* There is a long thread of innovative tradition within the intellectual history of Judaism that incorporates philosophical and metaphysical reasoning into biblical interpretation. Examples span many centuries, including eminent Jewish thinkers such as Philo of Alexandria (c.20 B.C.E. - c.50 C.E.) from the Hellenistic Jewish community in Egypt, Maimonides (1138-1204) in early Mediaeval Spain, Spinoza (1632-1677) in early modern Holland, and Moses Mendelssohn (b. 1729, d. 1786) in enlightenment Germany. From Ecclesiastes to Existentialism, by way of Aristotle and the Enlightenment, there is ample precedent to demonstrate that Torah and reason are not necessarily at odds with one another.

3) *In what ways can Jews use Torah as a lens through which to see other aspects of the wider culture within which they are integrated?* The remarkable nature of the biblical narrative is not a matter of how it defines the present according to the past, but rather how it can be read and reread in ways that are ever-relevant to the consideration of changing contemporary issues. In

attempting to gain an understanding of the nature of the relationships of the characters who have for so long provided reference points in discussion of the values of justice and responsibility, contemporary readers actually engage in speculation as to the nature of their own relationships by reading themselves and their own experience into the text.

The Exodus narrative, according to political theorist Michael Walzer, is the archetypal tale of liberation struggle. Illustrating the significance of the exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt for subsequent liberation struggles, he pointed out that “Wherever people know the Bible, and experience oppression, the Exodus has sustained their spirits and (sometimes) inspired their resistance.” (Walzer, 1985, p. 4) He listed examples (Walzer, 1985, pp. 3-6) as diverse as the Puritan Revolution led by Oliver Cromwell, a defense of Leninist politics by Lincoln Steffens, the American civil rights movement of the 1960’s, which can be traced back to the abolitionists in the days of legal institutionalized human slavery, and the “Liberation Theology” worked out by Latin American priests, among others. In the conclusion to *Exodus and Revolution*, he wrote:

Since late medieval or early modern times, there has existed in the West a characteristic way of thinking about political change, a pattern that we commonly impose upon events, a story that we repeat to one another. The story has roughly this form: oppression, liberation, social contract, political struggle, new society (danger of restoration). We call the whole process revolutionary, though the events don’t make a circle unless oppression is brought back at the end; intentionally, at least, they have a strong forward movement. This isn’t a story told everywhere; it isn’t a universal pattern; it belongs to the West, more particularly to Jews and Christians in the West, and its source, its original version, is the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. (Walzer, 1985, p. 133)

This story of moving from oppression to a new society is not merely a story *within* the Torah. It is the story *of* the Torah. The Book of Genesis sets up the backstory for how the Hebrews will become the Israelites, how they got to Canaan and what they will encounter upon their return after generations of slavery in Egypt. The following four of the five books of the Torah tell the story of how seventy descendants of Abraham give rise to the People that becomes Israel on its way to the Land of Israel.

The opening seven verses of the book of Exodus reintroduce “the sons of Israel, who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household,” to be refugees there during a period of prolonged drought in Canaan. The introduction briefly tells of the passing of the first generation and how their descendants became “exceedingly fruitful, bred, multiplied prolifically and filled the land.” (Ex. 1:7)¹⁰ Just fourteen more verses then relate the interim story of the Hebrews, between the days of their grandeur at the time of the death of Joseph and their many generations of enslavement by the time of the pharaonic decree ordering the drowning of all boys born to Hebrew mothers. The rest of the Torah tells of the transitional life and times of Moses, or *Moshe*¹¹ who was drawn from the waters of the Nile soon after his birth and who, according to the narrative, drew his people out of bondage in Egypt and

10 I have translated and transliterated from Hebrew, referencing dictionaries and translations of the Pentateuch, including: The Jewish Publication Society Tanakh, Schocken Bible, King James Version and the Watchtower Bible.

11 Names in the Torah often reflect the nature of the characters or events in their lives, reinforcing the idea that one is defined by one’s experiences and actions. ‘Moshe’ is the transliteration of the Hebrew name of Egyptian origin given by Pharaoh’s daughter who “... called his name: ‘Moshe’ (he-draws-out) and she said: I drew him from out of the water.” (Ex. 2:10) Were a translator to opt for a name that captures the sound of the Hebrew wordplay, ‘Moshe’ might be rendered into English as “Drew.”

went on to become the once and future greatest prophet of Israel.¹²

The Epic of Moses

The character of Moshe is revealed to the reader through two parallel perspectives. On a public level, we see him leave the house of Pharaoh and ultimately go on to become the leader of the Hebrew slaves. On an internal level, the reader is also privy to the intimate relationship that develops between Moshe and his experience, or his conceptualization of the God of Israel. The connection between Moshe and God, or *Elohim*,¹³ is described in the Bible as a series of sensory experiences. The simple reading, however, is not the only legitimate reading of the text. The relationship might be literal, figurative or imagined. Regardless of the degree of historical authenticity, the story also serves as an allegory that raises questions regarding human potential to effect change.¹⁴

Leading up to his meeting with *Elohim*, Moshe undergoes a stage by stage transformation of consciousness. Having grown up in the Egyptian Pharaoh's court, Moshe experiences a disrupting awareness of injustice. The narrative says nothing of his childhood as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. Just one verse after she names the baby, (Ex. 2:10) he becomes

12 "There never arose another prophet in Israel like Moshe, whom YHWH knew face to face." (Deut. 34:10)

13 Any difficulty in determining the correct transliteration or translation of the name of the prophet is as though a matter of no consequence in comparison to the challenge of accurately translating the name of the source of the prophecy. The English words 'God' and 'Lord' have been generally employed as euphemisms for the Name that, according to tradition, shall not be uttered. I have chosen here to transliterate and at times translate the Hebrew as it appears in the narrative, and to explain my reading of the text.

14 While I am not aware of other historical or literary references to bushes aflame that were not consumed by the fire, many have experienced a burning need to promote social justice in the face of oppression. The story can be compelling whether one reads of Moses' experience as a historical event or a literary reflection of universal truth.

the man who champions the cause of a Hebrew who was beaten by an Egyptian. (Ex. 2:11) As described in the narrative, he faces in one direction and then the other. Perhaps he looks to the left and to the right, or possibly the directions he faces are back into his past and then into his future. Seeing no witness, or perhaps seeing the nature of injustice, he strikes the aggressor down and hides the dead body in the sand. (Ex. 2:12)

The next day, when he attempts to solve an altercation between two Hebrews, he learns that his secret is known. “And when Pharaoh heard this matter, he sought to slay Moshe; But Moshe fled from the face of Pharaoh.” (Ex. 2:15) Having just recently lost his sense of knowing from where he came, he now knows neither where to go nor before whom he may be judged in the future. He knows only that his perception of everything he thought to be as it appeared was not an accurate reflection of things as they really are.

Ousted by his newfound consciousness from his childhood identity, left with a rejected past and an unknown future, Moshe attempts to escape his present circumstances. He is disoriented, without home or family, unfixed in time and space. Without knowing what is to become of him, the prince becomes a fugitive. He leaves in haste, without a plan. Whatever will be, will be; he will become whomever he will become.

“And [Moshe] dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.” (Ex. 2:15) Again, he risks his own safety to protect the weak from the powerful when he defends seven shepherd girls from their molesters. Speaking later with their father, they said,

“An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and also drew water, drew enough water for us, and watered the flock: And he said to his daughters, And where is he? Why is it that you have left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread:

And Moshe was content to dwell with the man; and he gave Moshe Zipporah his daughter: And she bore him a son, and he called his name Gershom (literally, ‘alien there’); for he said, “I have been an alien in a foreign land.” (Ex. 2: 19-22)

In marrying Zipporah (literally, a female bird) Moshe symbolically marries his freedom from Egypt. Having already left physically, he further distances himself from his past by joining the family of the priest of Midian and becoming a shepherd there. Yet in the naming of their son, Moshe reconnects to his past. If his marriage symbolizes cementing a new direction in his life, the birth and the naming of his son symbolizes a dialectical continuity between his past and his future, between preservation and innovation. Perhaps it is this clash of identities which compels him to gain clarification on his mission in life. It is in this condition that he ‘encounters’ the Divine calling.

Standing before the *sneh*, Moshe sees a bush all aflame yet unconsumed by the fire. Exodus 3:11-15 is the account of a conversation in which Moshe asks to know the name of *Elohim*. As the biblical narrative often includes names which indicate the essential nature of the characters, one possible method of understanding the relationship between the literary *Elohim* and the literary Moshe is through interpreting the various names ascribed in the text to the creative force in the universe.

^{Ex. 3:11} Then Moshe said to *The Elohim*, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and then take the descendants of Israel out of Egypt?”

¹²And He said, “I will be with you; this will be an indication for you that I sent you. When you have taken the people from Egypt, you shall worship *The Elohim* on this mountain.”

¹³ Then Moshe says to *The Elohim*, “So, I come to the children of Israel and I tell them, the *Elohim* of your ancestors sent me to you,’ and they say, ‘What’s His name?’... What do I say to them?”

¹⁴And *Elohim* says to Moshe, “I will be that which I become,” and, “This is how you tell the children of Israel, “*I will become* sent me to you.” ¹⁵And *Elohim* said

further to Moshe, “This is how you tell the children of Israel: The *Creator/YHVH*,¹⁵ the *Elohim* of your fathers, the *Elohim* of Abraham, the *Elohim* of Isaac, and the *Elohim* of Jacob, sent me to you: This is my name forever, and this is my reminder for all generations. (Ex. 3:11-15)

Again, he realizes that things are not necessarily as they appear to be. It is not through observation alone, but through reflective contemplation that Moshe becomes fully aware of ‘being.’ He figuratively comes ‘face to face’ with his previous realization that whatever will be will be. Meeting this idea as related in a first person encounter, or facing his new reality, he sets out on his new course, to go back to where he discovered that he was a stranger. He was free from the physical persecution of Pharaoh, but not emancipated from the past he was incapable of leaving behind. Regardless of whether or not Moshe actually has a physical meeting with *Elohim* or some sort of existential awakening, he is compelled by the inescapable conclusion that he must return to Egypt in order to catalyze change.

The biblical narrative employs the recurring motif of naming a character in three distinct ways in order to be very specific about intended meaning. In critical instances, the text makes particularly intimate references, such as the message to Abraham to rise and move on “from your land, your birthplace, your father’s house” (Gen: 12:1); the binding of Isaac, “Take your son, the only who you loved, Isaac” (Gen 22:2); or Jacob’s request to marry “Rachel, your daughter, the younger one.” (Gen. 29:18) There are, similarly, three names¹⁶

15 Many translations avoid using any of the variations of the Tetragrammaton, as many readers avoid its pronunciation. According to Gabel and Wheeler, “The taboo against pronouncing the Divine Name is a development of post-exilic Judaism and was certainly not in effect during the historical period covered by the Torah. ... Obviously the Priestly writer or redactor of the passage read back into the earlier period a custom from his own time that he felt required Mosaic authority.”

16 There are many other titles employed as references or names of God, such as El-Shaddai, or El-Elyon, but these are specific attributes, referring to the deity by its characteristics, rather than by name.

for the deistic concept: *Elohim*, *YHVH*, and *Ehieh Asher Ehieh*. Each in turn is an embodiment of three, and each connects the concept of the evolution of potential over time and the deistic concept.

The first connection is that *Elohim* represents himself in the text as the God of the Patriarchs, or more specifically, *Elohei Abraham*, *Elohei Isaac* and *Elohei Jacob*. The text does not refer to those things as one, but as separate entries in a list. And the list is not limited to three entries, but three plurals or groups of entries, perhaps those things which were considered to be ‘god-like’ in the time of Abraham, those things which were considered to be ‘god-like’ in the time of Isaac, and those things which were considered to be ‘god-like’ in the time of Jacob. They all combine to comprise the many which are one collective group. Moshe learns that something essential about each past generation is also essential in the present.

The second connection between the concept of time and the deistic concept is the verbal structure of the name *YHVH*. It is a combination of the past, present and future tense forms of the verb “to be” (*hayah*, *hoveh* and *yehiyeh*.) This verbal name of God could be translated as ‘that which will be in the future is that which has always been and is in the present,’ or ‘the essence of the present is the potential to become in the future, as was ever thus.’ *Ehieh Asher Ehieh* is the third connect between the concept of time and the deistic concept.

An explanation of what it means to be created in the image of a Supreme Being that has no physical image is that the essential characteristic of being human is not limited to past

assumptions or to what seems apparent in the present. The essence of one's present being is what will be in the future - the potential to become that which one will become. Whether or not there is *a* Supreme Being, external to one's own being, there is a state of being that is supreme. People can be passive beings or oppressed beings, and they can set their sites on their past or their present, assuming that what they know is all that there is, or they can believe that they have yet to become what they have the potential to become.

So, either Moshe encountered a Supreme Being which informed him that he also appeared before Abraham, before Isaac and before Jacob, or he attained the understanding of supreme being through pure reason, that regardless of experiences specific in time and/or place, the theological idea “descends from bare concepts of what would constitute the absolute completeness of a thing in general — and so by means of the idea of a supremely perfect first being — to determination of the possibility, hence the reality, of all other things.” (Kant, 1997, p. 102)

In either case, it is upon grasping this transformational realization that Moshe, standing barefoot before Sinai, looking into flames that do not consume the *Sneb*, compelled by the three-way tension between his new life in Midian, his past in Egypt and a vision of a better future in a land of promise, comes to believe that he can now speak to the Hebrews who would not listen to him in the past, and face Pharaoh, from whom he previously escaped. For the third time, he begins his life anew. Once pulled from the Nile and thrust into the palace of a false god, he would now pull his people out of the Land of the Nile and thrust them into the wilderness in search of their own potential to become a people.

Moshe's destiny was bound up in the struggle for the emancipation of his people, and he devoted every ounce of his being to that cause. He becomes the vehicle that precipitates change, yet the biblical narrative portrays *Elohim* as the driving force. One possibility is that the narrative is an accurate report of Moshe's miraculous encounter with the Supreme Being. Or, *Elohim* could be a catalyst of deep internal inspiration upon which Moshe arrived in the course of a transformational chain of events. *Elohim* might be the force of external control, or perhaps Moshe has a choice as to whether he will accept an offer of becoming a prophetic leader or reject that role of his own free will.

Could Moshe have walked away? Was the fire actually there? Did the events actually transpire? The answers to these questions remains sufficiently unclear that the reader is left with room to interpret how the story will influence his or her own behavior. Moshe, in any case, comes to the realization that he has a role to play in redefining the social order. Having previously rejected slavery, he now rejects a life of freedom, choosing instead a commitment to pursue the cause of liberty.

Having returned to Egypt and waged a successful revolt, Moshe leads his people into the desert—to the place where he gained an understanding of pure reason and grasped the theological idea of supreme being. Moshe's sensory representation of *Elohim* is by no means a representation of *Ehiyeh Asher Ehiyeh* in itself, but only a poetic device employed to convince the Hebrews to follow the moral imperative that he dictates to them as they set out to build a new society. (Kant, 1997) *Elohim*, "although not in the series of experiences, is nonetheless thought on behalf of experience, for the sake of comprehensibility" of the idea.

(Kant, 1997, p. 102) Neither the experience of their exodus nor the powers of reason led the newly liberated Israelites, however, to become philosophers. Having arrived at the place where Moshe saw the burning bush that was not consumed by flame, they are still enslaved to the idea that their welfare is dependent upon the grace and goodness of a leader who will lord power over them. A herd mentality overtakes them when Moshe is gone for too long, and they become idolaters to a deity they demand that Aaron fashion for them. The only flames they see are from the fire they light to melt their gold.

Freedom from slavery is not a sufficient condition to promote either rational or responsible behavior. For the duration of the biblical narrative Moshe will repeatedly remind the Israelites why they were brought out of Egypt, how they were brought out, for what purpose and with what obligations they and their descendants must live their lives. In his final days, Moshe speaks to the people, explaining that the choice of whether or not to follow the eternal commandments of YHVH is no less than a matter of life and death:

Look, I put before you today life and prosperity, or death and misfortune. ... Choose life—if you and your offspring would live by loving the LORD your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the LORD swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them. (Deut. 30:15-20, JPS trans.)

And the holiday of Passover is set as the annual reminder that the Jews are descended from slaves in Egypt, who entered Israel only after this admonition.

Passover

Passover is also known, in English, as the holiday of freedom. In Hebrew, however, it is called the holiday of liberty, *hag ha-herut* (חג החירות). The choice of words is significant

within a tradition so bound up in the written word. The two words are often used interchangeably in both languages, but few synonyms have exactly the same meaning. It is helpful to differentiate between the two in order to consider the complexities of being at liberty to make free choices. We speak of being free from... as opposed to being at liberty to... One might say, 'You are free *to* go,' but the implication is that you are free from constraints upon your movement. Erich Fromm suggested that "rebellion produces freedom from serfdom; freedom *from* may eventually lead to freedom *to* a new life without idolatry." (Fromm, 1966, p. 90) That would still be freedom *from* idolatry. As Freire wrote, the free people would have to adopt responsibility.

A look at the Hebrew words for liberty and freedom accentuates the difference. Freedom, *hofesh* (חופֵשׁ), conveys a release from a task or a burden. It is derived from nearly the same root as the word 'search,' *hipus* (חיפוש). The combination of these two similar words connotes the idea of vacating a place or condition in search of something that cannot be found there. The Hebrew word for liberty, *berut* (חירות), is similar to the word for responsibility, *abrayut* (אחריות), the root of which, (אחר) is the word for "other". The combination of these two words suggests the idea of being enabled to choose an alternate responsibility.

'Freedom' alone fails to communicate the full transition from slavery to liberty, which is a unifying thread running through the Torah. Liberation is a multi-stage process that transpires over generations. According to the Torah, a people oppressed into slavery is later emancipated, but if the story ended there, if the freed slaves simply dispersed or assimilated

into Egyptian life, the People of Israel would not have come to be a nation, and there would be no Jewish People today. Liberty is not merely the absence of constraint. The enduring power of the narrative is that the people continued searching in the desert, went on to create a new society, bound together by a covenant, and responsibility to their new laws.

The blessing of freedom is also a burden. Liberty unchecked by an ethical use of power can lead to corruption and possibly even to despotism. So many societies flourish through the domination or the conquest of others that it may seem as though there is no other way. Liberators often go on to become oppressors. Historical examples from slavery and conquest in ancient Athens to tyranny and dictatorship in contemporary Zimbabwe abundantly illustrate that the transition from oppression to emancipation can come full circle back to oppression. In many cases the liberated still function within an oppression orientation; they simply reverse the roles rather than dismantling the system. So, a revolt against injustice that ends with overcoming an oppressor does not, in itself, bring about a just situation. Establishing justice requires breaking the cycle of oppression and creating something qualitatively different.

Instilling in children an understanding of the significance of oppression and exploitation as well as an appreciation of liberty is an important element of emancipatory education. Understanding the mechanisms of injustice is a prerequisite for reducing the amount of oppression in their world, either by dismantling existing oppressive structures or by learning to avoid exploitation and to teach others to do so through their own awareness and appreciation for freedom and responsibility.

The Passover Haggadah

Parents and educators tell children stories, teach them lessons, instill them with expectations, and imbue them, both intentionally and inadvertently, with their cultural messages. The theme of emancipation is central to Jewish tradition, as exemplified by the annual Passover Seder, when parents are enjoined to transmit their culture by telling their children the story of the exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt. There is a clear imperative in the Haggadah, the traditional book of Passover readings, to "tell your son" and the emphasis is placed on telling more, rather than less, "Anyone who expounds upon the story of the exodus from Egypt... this is praiseworthy."

On this night, which is "different from all other nights," parents have an opportunity to tell their children something about their ancestors, where they came from, how they should understand themselves. The celebration of Passover is dedicated to the idea that the story of the transition from slavery to liberation is told in each family every year. The collective memory of oppression is transmitted from generation to generation as Jews teach their children that liberation is an essential part of their heritage. The Passover Haggadah enjoins readers, "In each and every generation, each person must see him or herself as one who went out of Egypt."

Why should each individual feel as though he or she is a liberated slave? Everyone knows some kind of slavery, some kind of 'Egypt.' Whether the chains are iron links that shackle people to oppressive labor, addictive substances, exploitation, sexism, racism, greed, or if they are the 'chains' which bind masters to making slaves of other people, everyone has a

potential interest in dismantling slavery. The significance lies in a critical reading of one's own life. Transforming the emancipation from slavery in Egypt into everyone's personal story is a way of recognizing and instructing each generation to be aware of the need for an ongoing struggle against oppression.

It makes no difference whether it was a historical or a mythical event, or whether one reads the Bible as factual revelation or as literature of enduring truth. By invoking the traditional commitment to feel as though each and every one personally bore and cast off the yoke of slavery, a window opens onto one's personal biography. Searching for the allegorical connections between slavery and the other forms of oppression people experience or observe becomes a natural part of the annual rhythm of life. Reading a text at a family celebration, year in and year out, increases the possibility that the text will have meaning all year.

The traditional Passover Haggadah encapsulates nearly the entire Torah, stretching a time line back hundreds of years before the exodus, three generations even before the arrival of the Hebrews in Egypt, to the story of Abraham. It reminds the reader how Joseph and then the rest of Jacob's clan made their way down to the fertile Nile region during a drought in Canaan, how their descendants became enslaved there and then recaps the exodus, ending with the perennial wish, "Next year in Jerusalem." Interestingly enough, the retelling eliminates the role of Moses, emphasizing that the Hebrews were brought out of Egypt by the outstretch hand of God, not by any other means.

Synopses are not merely shortened versions of longer stories. The process of whittling

down the content is a matter of preservation and elimination, emphasizing what the editor chooses to transmit. According to the traditional Passover Haggadah, Abraham and Amalek are in, while Moses and any suggestion of a human messiah are out. The process of interpretation is simply made more obvious when a text is thoroughly transformed, but a text cannot be read in exactly the same way by every reader in every generation. The words, even if they remain constant, are read through the layers of cultural context, translations, interpretations and associations which reflect the readers and the interpreters who reveal the potential meaning of the text. The reader is reflected in the text, and the text is reflected in the reader.

The classical rabbinic sages taught that there are many valid interpretations of the Bible. “There are seventy faces to the Torah. Turn it and, and turn it, for all is in it. (Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah, 1972, 13:15) This poetic assertion is as subject to interpretation as the characteristically ambiguous passages of the Torah itself. There are many instances of double meaning that are intrinsic to the nature of the text. The gaps in the stories that leave room for extrapolation and interpolation, wordplay and the inherent tension between literal and figurative meaning are definitive characteristics of biblical literature. An authentic translation, one that attempts to transmit the nature of the text as well as the language in it, preserves the range of possible meanings, rather than delineating the range of possible interpretations embodied in the original. A translator in search of meaningful possibilities in the text seeks to reflect the openness of the original in the rendering, whereas one who renders a narrow possibility of understanding the text seeks a reflection of the translator. This too is can be a

legitimate interpretation among others.

Readers and teachers add layers of interpretation and understanding on top of unchanging texts, claiming perhaps to reveal the deeper meaning of the text, even as they may be distancing themselves from the intention of the author. A day passes and another face is reflected in the text. A week passes and there are seven faces 'found' in the text. Then there are seventy faces of readers, interpreters - all reflected in the same text. Generations pass and there are seventy thousand, all teaching and learning the meaning of the unchanging words with the power to change the way people understand the teachings of their ancestors and the way they interpret the contemporary contexts of their own lives.

As solid iron can be heated and become malleable, the fixed words of a text become malleable through discussion and interpretation. A new understanding of a text can be hammered out. And when the process is over, the meaning wrought out of the words has a way of seeming fixed and immutable again. Over time, however, like a metal tool, a text can be polished, sharpened, reshaped or melted down and poured into a different mold. The reading and rereading of text in light of changing contexts is the ongoing process of making meaning. Culture is the foundry where meaning is forged.

So, the selective retelling is actually a different version of the story, a version with a different quality, which emphasizes certain aspects of the Torah, leaving others out, clarifying the significance of the role of God and rejecting any interpretation of the role of Moses that might suggest that a human could bring about such a revolution. The mix of prayer, ceremony and narrative, including references to the Torah along with tales and songs

from later periods in history, create a didactic tool for promoting a certain vision of the Jewish future.

The Four Sons

The categorical presentation of the four sons in the Haggadah is part of what parents are supposed to tell their children each year, and it says much about education. “The Torah speaks about four sons: the wise son, the wicked son, the simple son, and the son who does not know how to ask.”¹⁷ Who are these four children? This seems to be a curious tangent if emancipation is the theme of the Haggadah, but the detour has more to do with slavery and liberation than might appear to be the case at first glance.

The value-laden descriptions of four archetypal sons and their questions teach children about culturally appropriate and inappropriate ways of conducting discourse. The Passover Seder can be a vehicle for either reinforcing or reinterpreting traditional Jewish social norms. Reading the four sons in light of critical pedagogy designed to counter oppression raises crucial internal contradictions between celebrating the theme of emancipation and teaching values through the diametrical opposition of the ‘wise’ and the ‘wicked’ sons.

“The wise son—What does he say? He asks: “what are the testimonies, statutes and judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?” (Deuteronomy 6:20). On the one hand, this person is taking on the responsibility of continuing Jewish tradition. In that sense, it is clear why his question is labeled favorably. On the other hand, he is not

17 English translations of Hebrew from Passover Haggadah, from Steinsaltz, 1983

questioning as much as he is submitting a request for instructions. He seems more interested in the rituals of the Seder (literally, the 'order') than in the story of the liberation of his people. But the point of the ceremony is not merely the order; it is also about disorder, about overthrowing an unjust ruler and creating a new order. The traditional text instructs us, "In reply, you should teach [the wise son] all the ordinances of the Passover, ending with "Do not serve afikoman after the Paschal lamb." It is as though the text reads, 'Here is a vessel asking to be filled; fill it with every ceremonial detail, right down to the customs for the very end of the Seder.' Anyone can memorize a list of commands, but is that really what we need wise young people to learn? Perhaps it is implied that if the wise son can learn all of the ordinances, he must surely learn their emancipatory significance. The text does not explicitly say that, but a parent or a teacher could infer it.

"The wicked son—what does he say? He asks: "What do you mean by this service?" (Exodus 12:26). "You," he says, and not himself; and since he takes himself out of the collective body of the people, he denies a principle of faith. Therefore, you must provoke him ("set his teeth on edge"), and say: "All of this is because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8), for if he had been there, he would not have been redeemed!" This is a railing accusation, and the punishment for the crime of wondering aloud is excommunication. One who asks such a question is to be considered as though he would have been left in slavery in Egypt. But the evidence is inconclusive. The wise son also says, "upon you," not upon him, yet we are not taught to treat him as a heretic. Furthermore, the question of the wicked son is not so different from that of the simple son

who is regarded more benignly. The heretical element is that this son dares to question worship. This child phrased his question bluntly, as impatient adolescents often do, but is it really a 'wicked' question?

Was this 'wicked' son really removing himself from the community in questioning the worship of the faithful, or was he following a grand tradition of social criticism? Moses dared to challenge Pharaoh. Jewish tradition traces its own origin to Abram, the great father, the idol smasher who dared to call into question the worship of his father, Terah, the idol maker. The Hebrew prophets warned time after time against the sins of a society that encourages passive worship but does not act to stop injustice. It is easier for some parents to call a child wicked than to consider a challenging question posed by an irreverent youth. According to the traditional text, this child poses a problem—not only to the leader of the Seder, but to the Jewish people. Perhaps this is the kind of person who threatens any existing order. Surely we want our children to challenge injustice, but do we want them learning to question anything and everything? The 'wicked' son is offered up as an example of rupturing the continuity that the 'wise' son is preserving.

If we want to raise our children to be problem solvers we have to help them learn to pose problems. "In problem-posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation." (Freire, 1986, p. 70-71) Life in a reality in process can be unstable. The message of the Haggadah seems to be that when the Hebrews were slaves they needed transformation; but

now we need stability and 'wise' sons who ask technical questions about the rituals, not critically conscious, rebellious ('wicked') children who pose problems and challenges to the existing order. Raising one's own consciousness may be difficult, even painful for both the individual and the community, but uprooting injustice requires independent thinking and deep personal commitment. Questioning values is an important way for a person to develop his or her identity. Only a provocative child will dare ask the most essential questions in search of a better world. This child should be engaged, not scorned.

The simple son—what does he say? He asks: "What is this?" (Exodus 13:14). You should reply: "With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Exodus 13:14). It may seem that this child is simple-minded, capable of only the most basic question. 'Simple' is not, however, the only translation for the Hebrew word 'tam.' Naive, pure, innocent, or unsophisticated better relate the nature of the simplicity indicated by 'tam.' This innocent question falls between the conformity of the wise son and the insubordination of the wicked son.

"But as for the son who knows not how to ask, you must take the initiative, [lit: open for him] as it is written: "And thou shalt tell thy son on that day, saying, all of this is because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt." (Ex. 13:8). The Hebrew, שאינו יודע לשאול, is often translated as "one who does not know how to ask," but the word "how" does not appear in the Hebrew text. The Hebrew actually reads, "One who does not know to ask" or, "One who does not know to question." Habermas' three categories of knowledge (technical, practical and emancipatory) do not even include the possibility of

someone who cannot ask a question. Perhaps the child who knows not to question is immersed in what Freire calls the culture of silence. (Freire, 1986, p. 80) A child fully indoctrinated into a culture of oppression is only capable of following orders and cannot think critically about authority.

The language of the traditional text does not say “Tell him,” but “You open for him.” That sentence is not clear; it is ‘open’ to interpretation. It could mean, even if a child does not ask, open the receptacle that is a child’s mind and insert what you think he or she needs to know. On the contrary, it could mean ‘open the discussion’ even if he does not or cannot. Open the mouths of your children and get them talking. Open their eyes to oppression, their hearts to the desire to be free. Help them to become open-minded, to ask open-ended questions, to speak about their fears and their hopes out in the open.

The traditional Haggadah honors the technical question of one person and suppresses the emancipatory question of another. A contemporary edition might not only say “Tell your child...” and “Open for him,” but also “Ask your child,” and “Listen to your child.” Well then, who is wise and who is ignorant? Who is simple and who is wicked? A section about four parents might also be included. The parent who knows not how to answer, the simple parent who knows only the answers as they were written in the Haggadah, the wicked parent who does not respect an inquisitive child with provocative questions, and the wise parent who never tries to escape from a question and is not intimidated by a child who presents a challenge. Parents who encourage the questions of their children and help them to search for answers reinforce their naturally inquisitive minds. Such children are perhaps unknowingly

preparing to take on challenges in the future.

A reader unfamiliar with the biblical contexts of the quotations about the four sons in the Haggadah might assume that the entire story of the four sons is quoted from the Bible. In fact, the biblical quotes are not contiguous, and they amount to only a small portion of the tale related in the Haggadah. The biblical context of the quotes makes no reference to a wise, a wicked, a simple son or one who does not know to ask. The quotes are pieced together into an entirely new context, designed to bolster the argument for preservation of certain traditions while obscuring others, reflecting the world view of the teller of the tale.

Some contemporary Haggadah editors follow this tradition by refashioning the narrative of the four sons to reflect their own values. Some versions rewrite the text in English choosing to translate key words according to alternative meanings of the Hebrew, or even to rewrite the text in English so that it no longer corresponds to the traditional Hebrew. Some have adopted neutral language to include all children in the story. One feminist Haggadah spoke of four daughters, while another from the Israeli Kibbutz movement has simply edited this and other sections out of the Passover celebration. Pictures as well as words are used to convey the messages of various Haggadah editors. Some depict only children, others depict grown men. Still others show the four in a variety of ages. One text suggests that the four represent generations in a family. Another pictorial interpretation shows that the sons are four faces of one individual, suggesting that we all contain characteristics of each of the archetypal sons. A broad array of interpreters have used the familiar mold of the four sons to pour new content into the familiar story that belongs to everyone who celebrates

Passover.

Texts and ceremonies are passed on in different ways. People tell what may seem to be one story, yet they transmit different meanings. A commitment to tradition can mean many things, including the sanctification of the authority of some and the subservience of others, or it can provide the inspiring power to renew, transform and continue the process of human liberation. A shared tradition can be a varied tradition. In light of the myriad influences upon those who refract tradition through the lens of their own experience, how could it be otherwise?

Conclusion of Part II

Cultures foster their own continued existence through the transmission of messages that attach value to culturally embedded values and their related assumptions. They also adapt over time to accommodate prevailing conditions. The intentional transformation of cultural messages can to some extent mitigate the negative effects of social reproduction and the propagation of ideas that reflect the interests of dominant groups. Religious humanism provides the cultural underpinning to support the centrality of human emancipation from domination as a basic tenet of belief. The refashioning and the retelling of the 'The Four Sons' is an example of teaching children to eschew oppressive values rather than to preserve them. The active promotion of cultural transformation is not an indictment of tradition. It is, rather, a defense of the reflective selection of cultural preservation.

Part III: Reflective Practice in Experiential Learning

Introduction to Part III

The subject of Part III is an in-service program for the professional development of educators through collaborative practitioner inquiry. ‘Complex Reflective Practice’ is an intervention for development and change that promotes cultural transformation through reflective practice in experiential learning. I developed and facilitated the project in cooperation with the director and other colleagues at Brandeis University’s Genesis program for high school students, integrating Jewish studies, the arts, humanities and community building.

I was asked to join the staff of Genesis as an in-house educational consultant. The director and I agreed that I would write a case study of Genesis in advance of defining a job description or finalizing an agreement. I began my case study research early in 2002,¹⁸ joined the staff as an educational consultant that summer and completed my work there as the Senior Educator¹⁹ in August, 2006. During that period of nearly five years, I facilitated a process of developing and testing tools to support the work of professional educators. After several cycles of experimentation and reiteration, the approach we came to call ‘Complex Reflective Practice’ (CRP) became the conceptual framework of professional development as

18 I produced an unpublished paper entitled, “Genesis at Brandeis: A Case Study of Informal Jewish Education” in the framework of a doctoral course in case study methodology.

19 See Appendix ‘A’ for the senior educator job description.

well as the manner in which the staff members learned to function and collaborate throughout the summer.²⁰

The Role of Practitioner/Researcher

I originally set out to conduct the case study with a broad focus, looking to understand how Genesis was conceptualized and to learn about the goals of the program in order to evaluate its success. After interviewing the founding director, the current director and the lead educator of the program, as well as reviewing the promotional material and several course curricula, I sharpened my focus on the topic of ‘informal education,’ which repeatedly came up in the interviews and in the program material. I came to understand that this central characteristic of the program was an ill-defined term that offered only limited clarification of its goals, making it rather difficult to assess the success of the program, irrespective of the fact that past participants generally offered very positive feedback regarding their experiences at Brandeis.

Genesis was not established for the purpose of religious instruction, ideological training or the promotion of a particular movement or stream in Judaism. The intention is that a self-selected group of participants comprising a broad diversity of Jewish backgrounds can create a temporary community that allows for individual expression and accepts everyone’s practice and beliefs, or lack thereof, as legitimate and potentially valuable to the group. Each

20 My work at Genesis was supported by the theoretical underpinning presented in the previous two parts of this dissertation, which were in turn refined through my experience in the field before during and after my work at Brandeis.

individual can learn about him or herself through learning about and interacting with others. Much of this learning happens beyond the framework of the courses, in facilitated community-building activities and in everyday life, at meals and in the dorms, as well as during activities often considered to be religious in nature, such as welcoming or concluding the Sabbath, or prayer, for those who choose to partake. The participants are encouraged to define and create for themselves any variety of services in collaboration with each other and with their educators.

There were many more out-of-class, or 'informal' hours of facilitated and non-facilitated activities than the eighteen scheduled class hours per week. The out-of-class times could not reasonably be grouped into one category, since all they had in common was that they were all transpiring in various places that were not classrooms. In some cases, they actually were taking place in classroom spaces, even though they were not traditional classroom activities with which the participants would have been familiar from school. There was an additional complicating factor that confused the differentiation between class activities and non-class activities: many aspects of what happened during class were much less formal than what the students would experience in school. Anything from addressing instructors by their first names to the nature of the exercises built into the curriculum and the responsibility of the participants for the creation of the leaning environment in collaboration with the instructors who were often facilitating, but not usually standing in front of the class, would lead an observer or a participant to describe the class as an informal atmosphere. 'Informal,' therefore, lacked any appreciable meaning, other than to say that Genesis was different from

high school.

The term 'informal' is problematic in that it defines something by what it is not, rather than by characterizing it according to what it is. In spite of the general acceptance of the term, I found it to be unhelpful and even deleterious to the project in that it allowed for, and to some extent legitimated the fact that informal educators did not really articulate the essential nature of their work in clear and concise terms that could be analyzed and evaluated. 'Formal' education, the inverse from which 'in-formal' is derived, is itself problematic, in that it could refer to an indeterminate array of possibilities, from standardization or compulsory education, to the nature of the environment, to grading and homework, all of these or something else. It is not possible to clearly characterize an entity, an action or a situation only in so far as it is the opposite of something else, which is itself ill-defined. The title 'informal education' is little more than a justification for operating without classifying the appropriate forms of learning, homework or testing, without defining goals, relevant standards, or evaluating the success of the educators or the program in general.

As I became increasingly familiar with Genesis, my relationship with the program developed on parallel tracks: as a researcher and as an educational consultant. I realized that I was beginning to focus primarily upon the issue of informal education in both capacities. The two roles that I had earlier perceived to be potentially at odds with one another now seemed to converge in a sensible way. I identified what I understood to be a central yet unclear aspect of the program. As a researcher I would try to define the problem; as a practitioner I would try to contribute to solving it. As a practitioner/researcher working with

the educators and the instructors, I could involve them in characterizing education at Genesis as an approach to studying their own work and enhancing their capabilities and expanding their capacity.

I set out to find language that communicated greater logic and meaning. My intention was based on the assumption that characterizing the program according to what it was, rather than what it was not, would enable us to develop a common language. Then we could define and pursue common goals, and design standards toward which to strive.²¹ We eventually dropped the term ‘informal education,’ replacing it with ‘experiential learning.’²² We also dropped the word ‘informal’ from the job title ‘Community Informal Educator,’ opting to simplify the title to ‘Community Educator’ (CE), which is an accurate description of the role of the educators at Genesis who are not course instructors. We then defined a clearer framework for community education, which we presented to the educators and the participants, including the place in our planning which was defined as the space that the educators and the participants would fill, within the framework we created for them.²³

The remainder of Part III is devoted to a detailed summary of the process of Complex Reflective Practice. The sections in part 3.1 provide an explanation of the setting of my work

21 This effort led to a conceptualization project that yielded several documents that I authored and, in some cases, edited in collaboration with the director and colleagues at Genesis. Prime among them was a teaching essay entitled, “The Educational Philosophy of Genesis,” which is included below.

22 It was still necessary to clearly differentiate between ‘experiential learning’ and any other type. After all, any sort of learning, even the most narrowly restricted form of rote memorization, entails some sort of experience. Defining something in contrast to something else can be helpful, to a point, but we did not want to settle for vague terminology. The section on experiential learning at the end of Part I was drawn from the explanation and the practical definition of experiential learning I developed at Genesis.

23 For more on framing educational space, see the detailed explanation I wrote, “Creating a ‘Well-Framed Empty Space,’” which is the first section of Appendix D: “Participant Explorations at Genesis.”

with the educators at Genesis. Based in the speculation that it is possible to catalyze a process of change through educational intervention, the sections in part 3.2 provide a review of the intellectual toolset fashioned through carefully considered speculation, implementation and reiteration. Section 3.3 provides a report on Complex Reflective Practice in operation. Together the three sections comprise a complex theory.²⁴

The following diagram is the “Operation” region of Diagram 2, the complete version of which appears in the format section of the introduction. This part of the whole depicts the three sections in Part III and the interrelationships between them, wherein each of the following sections effects and is effected by the others. Section 3.1 provides an explanation of the setting where I carried out the intervention I designed in collaboration with my colleagues. Section 3.2 provides a detailed review of the material and the format of the CRP learning process. Section 3.3 includes examples of the results of Complex Reflective Practice in operation.

24 See the format section of the introduction for an explanation of the term “complex theory.”

III. Operation:
Intervention for Change

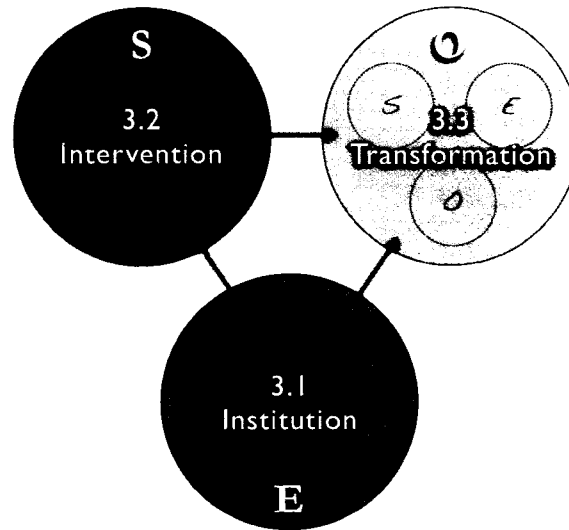


Diagram 2, Part III

3.1) Community Education at Genesis

I was involved in nearly all aspects of the planning and implementation of the educational program in my work with the community educators and with the course instructors. From this point on, I will focus in particular on the process of reflective investigation I facilitated in my work with the community educators. The process begins with the introduction of the material and continues through a step by step description of the stages leading to the results of the practitioner research the CEs carried out. It concludes with the presentations of the reflective investigations to the staff after the participants left the program.

The community educators²⁵ at Genesis function as the residential staff, as a programming

25 See Appendix B: "The Community Educator (CE) Position at Genesis."

team, designing and implementing explorations²⁶ for the participants, and as a research team, working on their reflective investigations. They consider which elements of their adult learning are appropriate and transferable to the programming they develop for the adolescent participants at Genesis. This learning community was at the heart of the larger community, and it served as the inner core of of the generator that powered Genesis.

Our work with the CEs was designed with enhancing their efficacy in mind. We invested a great deal of thought and time in their professional development. They were a target population of the program, and contributing to their learning process was also a method of generating a highly intentional group of educators focused on creating the program for the adolescent participants. We brought together a diverse group of talented educators and engaged them in learning about themselves, each other and the our expectations for the work they would do together. It was not merely an encounter seminar; the exploration of difference in their group was directly connected to their professional roles as educators with a joint project to conduct. This process catalyzed a series of reactions that enabled them to generate creativity and community building through the experience of working together on the project of preparing for their shared task of running the month-long residential program with the teenaged participants. The CE staff was the inner core of Genesis, spinning faster and hotter than the whole, at times with seismic activity sending shock waves of transformative learning from the core through the community.²⁷

26 See Appendix D, "Participant Explorations at Genesis."

27 See Appendix E, "Generative Modeling." I wrote this statement on the topic as a basis for a discussion among the senior staff members in order to make the process transparent, explicit and intentional, so

This charged atmosphere was also a challenging and at times difficult one in which to conduct business. Relationships among the educators were often rife with displays of contention as well as expressions of collegiality. Friendships developed on the surface, as subtle competition and even adversarial relationships provided an undercurrent of tension between some of the members of the group. In many ways, the CE staff was a microcosm of many of the relationships developing in the community, and we often observed that issues of significance within the group of educators were reflected in interesting ways by the participants.

One of many examples was a project on the exploration of gender, sex roles and stereotypes which the educators designed for the participants. The CE's planned a six-day progression of programs that could have been devoted to the study of any topic of their choosing, according to a skeletal programming model the director and I designed for them to flesh out.²⁸ Their choice to investigate gender was not obvious. They first generated a long list of possibilities, and only slowly narrowed down the list and concluded their search. Then, before the participants arrived, the educators got down to work in earnest on their plan to conduct an exploration of gender, sex roles and related issues.

Gender issues are always relevant in group work, perhaps especially with young single adults working closely as a team, and certainly with teens. It later became apparent, however, that gender was a more significant theme among the educators that summer and even more

that we could think clearly about the transmission of ideas within the staff and then among the wider community.

28 See Appendix D, "Participant Explorations at Genesis."

so among the participants, than had been the case in recent summers at Genesis. So much so, in fact, that by the time the exploration of gender related issues and sex roles began in the second week of the program, when the participants had already been involved in contentious incidents between the sexes in the dorms and had already begun discussing mutual respect, they were sure that the CEs had put the program together in response to their behavior during a series of incidents at the end of the first week of the program. Without a control group of educators or a control group of participants, we had no scientific way of comparing the experience of this group to another, or attempting to replicate the results of a study. We did, however, see this sort of pattern repeat itself. There was little doubt that more than coincidence was at work when the experiences of the inner core of educators were reflected in the experience of the larger group of participants in the program even though we could not predict or control how this phenomenon would become manifest from week to week or from summer to summer.

Our work with the educational staff began each year in the spring, well in advance of their arrival to Brandeis. The director and I each conducted one-to-one meetings with each individual educator, usually in person, occasionally by phone, as there were times when educators were hired from as far away as California and Israel. They were all asked to write statements on their personal philosophy of education as part of the application process. We then used these statements as the beginning of an exchange during the intake process. I responded in writing with questions intended to encourage each educator to further probe their own minds and examine their experience as educators, in order to help them articulate

their goals and to identify the issues they might be interested to investigate while they were working at Genesis. The statements and our subsequent exchanges provided a focal point for my initial meeting with each of the educators.

The first group activities for the newly assembled educational staff, most of whom had not yet met one another at this point each year, were the establishment of an electronic discussion list through which each member introduced her or himself to the others and two telephone conference calls. The calls were devoted to introductions and technical matters, and we began a discussion on the educational philosophy of the program. The discussion continued when we began working together at Brandeis.

The following essay, "The Educational Philosophy of Genesis at Brandeis University," offers a relatively brief treatment of the more in-depth theoretical underpinning of the program. Designed to be the length of an academic article, it is intended as a learning document that would serve as a starting point and establish a common vocabulary for further discussion. I wrote the first draft in 2002, and edited several subsequent versions in response to how it was received and with the input of colleagues. The document is still in use, and has been shared by the director with educators outside of Genesis as a background statement on Genesis and Jewish experiential learning. We used it during the orientation for the educators and in order to introduce new instructors to our expectations of the program. The questions which appear at the end of each of the three main parts provided the bases of a series of discussions on the text, which preceded our active educational collaboration.

The Educational Philosophy of Genesis at Brandeis University²⁹

Preface

Our primary purpose in preparing this conceptualization of Genesis is to clarify the theoretical underpinning of the program. We intend for this to be a useful essay as we go about planning curricula and activities. We also hope to develop the foundation of a common language for a dynamic discussion through which we can all teach and learn from one another. In order to insure that we are collaborating effectively, we need to establish a common vocabulary. Many words mean different things to different people. Some popular terms that encapsulate complex ideas are often reduced to one or two words used without a complete explanation or definition. In the absence of a rich context, a word or phrase could be meaningless or, worse yet, misleading.

Our intention for this project is to outline broad concepts and to encourage everyone at Genesis to think both creatively and practically; to search for, experiment with, and refine effective methods of teaching and learning. It is to some extent a reflection of what happens during the summer at Genesis. It is also a reflection of what we want to see as the program continues to develop. It is not intended to be a manual with all the answers. The thinking of educational theorists and theologians such as John Dewey³⁰, Mordecai Kaplan³¹ and others

29 This fourteen page Genesis document is included in its entirety. The following eight footnotes appear in the document for purposes of explanation and citation.

30 John Dewey (October 20, 1859 – June 1, 1952) was an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, whose thought has been greatly influential in the United States and around the world. He is recognized as one of the founders of the philosophical school of Pragmatism (along with Charles Sanders Peirce and William James), the father of functional psychology, and a leading representative of the progressive movement in U.S. education during the first half of the 20th century.

31 Rabbi Mordecai Menahem Kaplan (June 11, 1881- November 8, 1983) founded Reconstructionist

who are noted in the text inform this statement, but it grew out of a discussion on what the program has achieved and it was produced through continued written communication and periodic conversations about how Genesis should continue to grow in the future. Your feedback is critical for the success of the project. We will devote time during the staff training and throughout the summer to discussing questions, responses and issues related to this document. You are invited to think critically about the ideas presented and to enrich this statement by introducing new ideas. We hope to use this project to set the standards to which we should hold ourselves accountable. Most of all, we need to work together to plan curricula with strong connections between theory and practice.

Part I

Judaism as a Creative Life Context

Genesis educators create the framework for the participants to experience building a pluralistic Jewish community. The combination of study in academic and creative disciplines, the arts and becoming part of the dynamic of the group, is designed to help the participants to achieve familiarity and intimacy with each other and their world. The community becomes a laboratory for exploring the potential and coping with some of the challenges diversity can present.

Judaism. He was born in Lithuania and was ordained as a rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), in New York, in 1902. While JTS was affiliated with Conservative Judaism, rabbis at that time found it easier to move between denominations than they do today; as such Kaplan began his career as an Orthodox rabbi at Kehillath Jeshrun, a synagogue in New York. He helped to create the Young Israel Modern Orthodox movement with Rabbi Israel Friedlander, was a leader in creating the Jewish community center concept and helped found the Society for Advancement of Judaism.

Hebrew culture extends into the remote past. Our civilization is the result of countless interactions among our ancestors, between competing and cooperating cultures and societies, and with nature. Each of us is a link in the continuity of our culture and all of humanity. And each is involved in renewing and sharing the heritage of values we have received. John Dewey wrote,

Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generally shared than we have received it. Here are the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind.³²

According to Dewey's vision, community schools and the educational process should serve as the focal point of the effort to bring about social change. Dewey's concept of the school as the social center asserts that a school should be a place where children learn both what it means to be democratic citizens and what they need to know in order to function as contributing independent members of society.

At Genesis we encourage the educators and the participants to explore, reflect upon, and become aware of the choices we make about our participation in the community. Choosing to be consciously responsible for clarifying, broadening, deepening, and expanding our cultural heritage will enable those who come after us to receive it more coherently, more widely accessible and more generally shared than we have received it. We aim to gain a greater understanding of our past, the world of today and to consider how we can add

32 Dewey, John. A Common Faith, in *Later Works*, Vol. 9:57-58.

meaning to our lives and realize our potential in the future. We do this through study, common learning experiences and celebrating together. And we investigate these texts and contexts.

In some cases, celebrating together means doing the same things while other times it means being aware of how and why we do things differently from one another. The rich heritage of Judaism developed as an adaptable, fluid tradition. At Genesis we search for ways to experience and examine elements of that tradition in the different lives and lifestyles of the members of the community.

The purpose of Jewish education in America should be to qualify the child to meet with an ethical and affirmative attitude all of life's situations and relationships – economic, sexual, civic, human and cosmic. Each of these relationships implies a certain set of ideals and habits, certain satisfactions and discontents, certain elements of permanence and of change. It should be the aim of Jewish culture to enable the human being to live in all of these relationships so as to elicit the best in himself and in those about him.³³

Exposure to the world of another is also a window on our own world. We look out at something we have not seen before, try to understand it and appreciate it in its own context. Then we can turn to ourselves from a slightly different perspective and become more conscious of how and why we do what we choose to do in our own lives. We apply our understanding of our heritage to our contemporary lives and we examine that heritage in light of our experience.

By creating the opportunity for reflection, while being mindful to avoid forcing the issues,

33 Kaplan, Mordecai M. [1957] (1981). *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society. p. 484.

we enhance the opportunity to appreciate the significance of our experiences. We define ourselves in relationships; we develop individual identity through interactions. We try to build a community characterized by the social fabric that is created by its distinctive members' lives being interwoven such that both individuals and the community are ever apparent.

Questions:

1. Dewey sees the community school (or for our purposes the Jewish educational framework) as responsible for providing young people with what they need to know in order to function as independent contributing members of society. What are some of the 'things' students need to know? What are the best ways for them to learn these 'things'?
2. Both Dewey and Kaplan refer to the importance of adaptation. How can we become more aware of our initial assumptions and subsequently more aware of how we pass on knowledge, where we choose to innovate and where we choose not to?
3. How can we balance sharing the responsibility for creating a community and learning together with legitimizing the many differences among the members of the community? What problems should we expect to encounter?
4. Have you taken part in educational programs or been part of communities that seek to encourage both strong, independent individuals and a coherent, supportive community? What are some of the issues we encounter when we strive to support the needs and the interests of individuals as well as those of the collective?

Part II

Education at Genesis

Education at Genesis is intent on fostering true dialogue between the members of a widely diverse Jewish community. There is also a dialogue established between aspects of traditional Judaism and our contemporary experience. Genesis course instructors and community educators lead participants into experiences in academic disciplines, in the arts and through the dynamic of the group, all designed to help the participants achieve familiarity and intimacy with each other and their world. The educators serve as mediators guiding younger and less experienced people into familiarity with aspects of the wider world that are new to them. They enhance the ability of the participants to become critical thinkers and independent learners through a cooperative social partnership.

The high school students who come to Genesis are not merely participants. Genesis looks upon these students as partners, educators and leaders. Most importantly, Genesis implements programming that supports this philosophy. We believe that in order for the Genesis experience to be deemed successful and worthwhile, participants must be able to bring aspects of their experience on the Brandeis campus into their home lives and communities. The high school students are not seen as recipients of knowledge but rather equal members of a learning and activist community. This philosophy demands more of the educational staff. This philosophy demands that the educational staff hear each voice and respond to each member of the community.³⁴

Martin Buber³⁵ differentiated education from indoctrination through “the distinction

34 From, “Genesis at Brandeis University’s Progress Report to The Righteous Persons Foundation,” 2001

35 Martin Buber (8 February 1878 – 13 June 1965) was an Austrian-Jewish philosopher, translator, and educator, whose work centered around theistic ideals of religious consciousness, interpersonal relations, and community. Buber's evocative, sometimes poetic writing style have marked the major themes in his work: the retelling of Hasidic tales, Biblical commentary, and metaphysical dialogue. A cultural Zionist, Buber was active in the Jewish and educational communities of Germany and Israel. His influence

between the propagandist, who imposes his “truth” on those he manipulates, and the true educator, who is concerned with the unfolding of others and trusts that each will find his own unique relationship to the truth for which the educator witnesses: All true education is help toward self-discovery and toward self-unfolding.”³⁶

At Genesis the participants are encouraged to engage in new activities and to encounter different people. We gain a greater understanding of ourselves through relationships; we develop individual identity through human interaction. By experiencing new and potentially uncomfortable situations in a supportive environment we explore values together with people who bring a variety of perspectives to the discussion. The residential setting allows for this exploration to be conducted in the classroom, in less formal settings where personal expression is emphasized over traditional learning and through the personal interaction of participants outside of scheduled activities.

The Participants as Peer Educators

There are a number of opportunities built into Genesis for participants to become involved in planning and leading educational experiences. The community educators actively recruit their involvement in preparation for community education programs, Shabbat, and activities during unstructured time. They also schedule time to sit with participants when they are involved in planning and implementing programs in order to evaluate the process,

extends across the humanities, particularly in the fields of social psychology, social philosophy, and religious existentialism.

36 Friedman, Maurice. *Encounter on the Narrow Ridge: A Life of Martin Buber*. Paragon, New York. 1993. p. 124

its successes and difficulties. Course instructors design their courses to allow participants' different types of opportunities to influence the direction and perspective of the course. Each of the arts workshops is intentionally designed to be a venue for participants to express themselves on their own terms.

This structure is well suited to encourage participants to take responsibility, develop independence, and begin to feel invested. Ownership, however, is not limited to the participants who plan specific activities. Our goal is for all participants to feel invested, engaged, and actively involved. When a participant has a sense of ownership she will try to get the most out of the activity that she can, strive to actively contribute to the success of the activity in some way and do her part in helping create a positive experience for others.

Ideally, participants will feel ownership over the development of the community experience as a whole, over the learning process (not just their own), and over the atmosphere of exploration and discovery that all participants (including staff) experience over the course of the summer. The process of involving participants in planning programs—a worthy end in itself—is also a step toward encouraging them to experience the more subtle and farther reaching goals of the program. When they buy in to this notion of participation, they move from being passive consumers of an educational product to becoming “owner-operators” of their experience. At that point they are more likely to exercise their individuality and the skills they are developing to deal with difference and discord in a challenging group setting.

Learning at Genesis is a collaborative process. As educators and participants collaborate

in the creation of a community they learn together through an ongoing process of transformation. Responsibility for learning is shared between the educators and the participants, both of which groups take active roles in the community.

In summary, here are five guiding principles³⁷ of experiential learning, of which we are mindful at Genesis:

1. Formal and informal education are integrated. Administrators, community educators and classroom instructors cooperate in making study, meaningful work and social activities—all aspects of life—part of the educational experience.
2. Curriculum is created locally by instructional teams that model the process and facilitate the development of the participants to achieve autonomy in their own spheres of activity.
3. Apolitical, non-sectarian values education is balanced with a concern for the role of Genesis in fostering certain social, cultural, religious and even national values.
4. The group experience is also focused upon the development of individuals.
5. Life in the Genesis community is modeled on adult society including experimentation with talents and abilities through legitimate trial and error.

Questions:

1. The role of the educator has been described in this document as leader, mediator, guide, helper, enhancer and collaborator. Are there other, perhaps better ways to explain what

³⁷ This list is adapted from a discussion of six central principles of progressive education in: Dror, Yuval. "Progressive Informal Education Interpreted by the Founders of Kibbutz Education in Eretz Yisrael (Palestine), 1918-1948" Blackwell E-Journal of Education History. <<http://www.cedu.niu.edu/blackwell/dror01.htm>>

an educator does? What metaphors would you choose to describe the relationship between an educator and a young person? (Ex.: master and apprentice, guard and prisoner, sculptor and statue, gardener and flower...)

2. Relating to the section on Buber: How do we as educators balance our need to reach the goals we set and our responsibility to, “help toward self-discovery and toward self-unfolding.” Is Buber suggesting that education is only facilitating the process of unfolding? Should educators avoid setting their own goals?
3. Sharing responsibility for learning means that educators must forego tight control over the learning environment. Making participants real partners brings with it the increased risk that your plans will not be realized as you envisioned them. The participants too are exposed to the increased risk of disappointment when they are not given the structure of clear expectations and strict guidelines for their performance on assignments. Since most high school students are used to reacting to extrinsic motivation (tests, grades, prizes, sanctions), there is also the possibility that flexibility on the part of the educators will be interpreted as low expectations which they could internalize. How can we maintain high personal standards, and how should we deal with our feelings when our expectations have not been met? How can we encourage the participants to set high personal standards, and how should we deal with their feelings when they are disappointed that their expectations have not been met?

Part III

Mutual Support

The participants at Genesis learn from and together with their educators. The cooperative atmosphere of this model encourages participants to take central roles, both in the classroom and in the community. Educators and participants can lead meetings or learning sessions together. Participants serve on committees and plan activities. They are faced with the responsibility of dealing with issues such as curfew and searching for solutions to social problems that arise over the course of the summer. They are allowed to make mistakes in a trial and error process of learning to cope with real life challenges. Sharing the responsibilities of learning and living together can enable people to develop a sense of ownership over their learning and their potential to work with others toward a common purpose. Encouragement (enhancing courage) or helping learners to feel confident about using their knowledge, is the opposite of intimidation (causing people to feel timid), which is achieved through coercion - real or perceived penalties and punishments. There may be subtle ways to encourage more and to intimidate less. Shared responsibility implies learning to be conscious of when we are encouraging and when we are intimidating others, even if only unintentionally.

What happens when learners become personally invested in an activity that does not live up to their expectations or the perceived expectations of others? One task of an educator is to provide the tools to deal with this experience in a positive way. Individuals should be encouraged to push themselves and others to learn, grow, and strive for high personal and

communal standards, and to feel pride and excitement at their successes. Yet, the product should not be seen as the end of the process. If they believe or if they become convinced by others that they have failed, they are likely to become unnerved. If they lose confidence, the experience may lead to more harm than good.

How can an educative process help participants cultivate their potential when they are faced with their own shortcomings? Rather than being discouraged by disappointment, learners should be encouraged to accept the outcome of their experimentation with a sense of humor and appreciation for what they have achieved. By experiencing ownership in this way, participants can see such events not as failures, but as opportunities to think reflectively and critically about what might have caused the program to be unsuccessful, and how they can think and plan differently in the future.

A commitment to both excellence and acceptance is also a key piece in developing and maintaining respect and compassion within a community. A sense of balance enables individuals to view themselves and their accomplishments with pride and equanimity and also to approach others' achievements with grace and true appreciation. Through mutual support, students can begin to trust, to share honestly, to value the success of others and to respect a wide variety of abilities, strengths and worldviews.

Tikun Olam (*Repairing the World*)

When we embrace the possibility of changing our society we believe that we have the ability to improve the world, to make ourselves and our communities more caring,

compassionate, nurturing, supportive, and participatory. Making our communities and the world a better place depends on the existence of a vision. A person or a group must possess an idea that will enable them to re-imagine their world before they can move themselves and others toward reorganizing their reality. In order to learn to become problem solvers people need to develop their ability to perceive the way they exist in an ever-transforming world. They must learn to reflect on their observations, to understand the complexity of problems, and to propose solutions. We can all do more in our lives to make our interactions, relationships and communities more meaningful and more widely accessible. We need to heal our communities and to be aware of the need to take an active part in the shared responsibility of repairing the world - even when our own community is not "broken." One goal at Genesis is for participants to gain awareness of the specific problems facing their communities and to begin to think about how they might be addressed.

Reflective Thinking

Meaningful experience triggers a process that begins with excitement and continues through interest and curiosity. It is also possible to develop intellectual appreciation of the significance of experience through reflection. This encourages the development of the will of the participants who, through cultivation of their thoughts and ideas, may ultimately decide to join an effort or to initiate an activity aimed at making their community the way they want it to be. There is no need for a learner to be reflective about their thinking in order to perform well on a test when teaching and learning is focused on memorization and

examination. But when learning means covering uncharted territory, and when a “test” requires that a person rise to tasks that have not been spelled out for them, success may depend upon creativity, risk or resourcefulness.

Questions:

1. Can you recount an experience when you felt that you were involved in a joint effort in which a creative outcome was dependent upon a particularly high level of collaboration and mutual support?
2. Have you been disappointed by an experience in which the combined contributions of the actors amounted to much less than their combined potential to achieve a common goal? If so, what contributed to this outcome?
3. Can you think of times when you were intentionally intimidating or purposefully intimidated by someone else? How did the situation come about? What was the outcome of the encounter?
4. Can you think of times when you realized that you were inadvertently intimidating? How did you realize it? What was your response to your behavior?³⁸

38 End of document, “The Educational Philosophy of Genesis at Brandeis University.”

Orientation

The first organized activity of the pre-program orientation for community educators was a text study of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which enabled us to achieve many objectives in one session. First of all, we sat down to learn together and to establish ourselves as a learning community, even before we discussed the work in which we would be engaged. The second objective was to establish the pluralistic atmosphere of this particular learning community. We had members of our group who leaned toward a more literal understanding of the Bible and others with a variety of liberal religious interpretations of the text, as well as secular Jews who read the bible as Hebrew mythology with no regard for either the existence of a divine being or religious authority. All views were welcomed and valued, even if they were examined and challenged in our joint study.

The story of Adam and Eve is particularly appropriate for raising issues of adolescent development and education, such as dealing with authority and taking personal responsibility. We could move from considering how the first male and the first female attained knowledge in the space provided for them in Garden of Eden to discussing what we wanted seventy young people who were not familiar with one another to learn, and how the educators would establish authority and deal with transgressions in the 'Garden of Brandeis' that we created for the participants of Genesis.

Lastly, our reflecting on the possible meanings of the text and our examination of the assumptions we brought to it provided fertile ground for planting the last seeds of reflective practice before beginning the investigations. They had already engaged in the reflective

exercise of writing their personal statements, and they had also read and discussed the statement of educational philosophy at Genesis. Now they were engaging in meaningful conversations and beginning to understand more about each other's cultural contexts and related assumptions, opinions, learning styles and openness to one another.

3.2) Elements of the Complex Reflective Practice Process

Over the course of the coming days, I would meet with each of the community educators separately to begin work on their individual projects. The group continued learning about both the program they would be planning and implementing for the participants and the reflective investigation in which they would be participating as individuals and as members of a research team. Preparing for their reflective investigations was one of the three main emphases of the orientation, along with becoming familiar with one another and working together as a team to plan programming for the summer. Many of the orientation activities served two or all three of these purposes. I was an active co-facilitator of the orientation program, together with the director of the Genesis. I prepared a series of documents and diagrams (included below), which I presented and discussed with the community educators at various points during the orientation, as I guided them into and through the initial stages of the process of reflective investigations.

By the end of the orientation, the CEs had: 1) written a personal statement on their philosophy of education, read my comments and the questions I posed to them, and reviewed their statements in some depth with me; 2) read and discussed the "Educational

Philosophy of Genesis at Brandeis University;” 3) read a scholarly article, “The Getting of Wisdom: What Critically Reflective Teaching is and Why It's Important,” by Stephan Brookfield, which dealt with some of the issues that are key to the process; 4) delved into their own autobiographies to consider who they were as teens as they prepared to welcome a group of teens to the campus the following week; 5) discussed their motivation for becoming Jewish educators; 6) implemented programs for one another, which they then reviewed through a model of peer feedback;³⁹ 7) begun working together to plan programming; and, 8) they had begun to choose the topics for their own reflective investigations.

They had been using all of the reflective lenses described below, and they were deeply involved in both their work and their reflective learning that was focused on their workplace. After the orientation week, I continued weekly meetings with the group as a whole to facilitate their reflective learning within the framework of their work with the program participants, and with each educator individually to help them develop their reflective investigations. Each of the following sections is one of the documents or frames of reference that served to explain the framework for the reflective investigations.

Genesis '06, Staff Orientation⁴⁰

Our goals for this orientation are to establish the foundations of our learning community

39 See Appendix F, “Peer Observation and Reflective Feedback” which the lead educator and I developed for the use of the community educators.

40 This section is the introductory text which was distributed to the community educators after the initial learning session, during the orientation week before the teen participants arrived.

and to focus on our working relationships within it. We will focus on an introduction to the program and its philosophy, our approach to curriculum design and programming, and establishing a common understanding of key concepts and of one another. If you are feeling that the job description you have signed onto is not entirely clear, you are probably not alone. The picture will come into focus over the next few days.

The fuller explanation of Genesis is woven into the learning experience and the creative process of working at Genesis. You will learn more with each orientation activity, through creating this learning community and through bringing the participants into it next week. Your understanding will continually expand, like a spiral, a bit at first and then in a broader way, until it encompasses the range of opportunities and responsibilities facing educators at Genesis. We know where we are starting, and we have a strong sense about the direction, but we can't predict exactly where we will end up, because our plan for this journey is to 'make the road by walking.'

Here is a quick preview of where we are headed. The community educators will learn what an exploration is by planning one, by facilitating the participants in the space you will create, by learning to collaborate with the members of your team, by reworking the plan and by running the program a second time. The interns will learn about community service through conceptualizing it for the participants, by taking them off campus, working with them at the sites, reviewing the process and taking them out again, and again a few days later. You will all be working together on Shabbat planning and other aspects of residential life. In the mean time, as you reflect on your work, you will be preparing to help the participants

reflect on the significance of their experiences.

You will learn to investigate your practice (and hopefully something about your potential) by conducting a facilitated reflective investigation. Over time, you'll be able to customize the tools and develop your own uses for them. Even during the summer you will be able to apply what you learn to how you teach. Through all these projects, we anticipate that you will provide the sort of insightful feedback that will influence any and perhaps every aspect of the program.

Goals of Complex Reflective Practice⁴¹

We become the sort of learning community that we want to promote at Genesis by conducting reflective investigations into our work as educators. We have discussed our aim to balance the programming at Genesis so that there will be room for individual expression and self-discovery on the one hand, and for exploring community and responsibility as a member of the group, on the other. Just as this is a priority for the learning of the participants, it is important that we, as educators, take part in a learning process that is similarly balanced.

There are four basic interrelated goals of this approach. The first goal is to augment the ability of educators to develop learning experiences that will be intrinsically meaningful for the participants of the program. In doing so, we aim to encourage independent, reflective and critical thinking about their identity and their role in the various communities in which

41 This section is adapted from the text distributed to the community educators to introduce the concept of *reflective practice*, during the orientation week before the teen participants arrived.

they interact with others. The second goal is to enhance the efforts of the individual educators and of the group working as a team by providing a constructive role and meaningful content to the framework of the community education staff. The third goal is to contribute to the amelioration of potentially divisive or otherwise problematic tensions including issues of alienation, competition and contention among the staff members. The fourth goal is to minimize the unproductive effects of the barriers that naturally exist between adults and adolescents who enter the roles of authoritative teachers and subordinate learners.

The underlying assumption of the approach is that educators are more likely to establish productive relationships focused on developing the potential of a learning community when they come to their task with a meaningful purpose and a well-conceived job description. Toward that purpose, we designed a series of problem-solving mechanisms to channel the energy that is often devoted to navigating a rough work environment into a collaborative attempt to understand the challenges they face as individuals and as a team. There is a delicate balance between the individual and the community, a tension with great potential that can be both creative and destructive. Individuals who cope effectively with this challenge can contribute to the community and also enhance their own abilities.

Each educator is multiply engaged at Genesis, taking on many overlapping yet distinct roles; they are at once participating as individuals who have chosen to experience the program themselves, as members of a learning community within the framework of the educational staff, as staff members charged with creating a learning community for the

adolescent participants, and as adult members of that community trying to find a place within it that is neither overbearing nor inconsequential. These roles are further complicated by the many new relationships the educators develop in a short time with employers, colleagues and participants.

As Lee Schulman stated, the community of learners model suggests that, “We must be prepared to live in a world where different people have come to know different things in depth, and where they develop the capacity to collaborate with one another when there are problems to solve, problems that transcend what any individual can do alone.” (Shulman, 2004, p. 487) The individual learner, then, does not become subordinate to the community or to its leaders, but becomes a unique element in a team where people have different roles, each contributing to the realization of both personal and collective goals.

It is common, and perhaps likely, that the needs of the group as defined by its dominant figures will supplant the needs of the individual, even to the point where the defined needs of the group become the self-perceived needs of the individual. As such, critical reflection is a necessary method of keeping the power of the group in check and contributing to the enhancement of each of the individuals, even as the focus is on the sum of the parts.

Reflective Investigations⁴²

Goals

The intended outcome of reflective practice (both writing a personal statement on your

42 This document is the guide to beginning the investigation process distributed to the community educators, during the orientation week before the teen participants arrived.

educational philosophy and the investigation of your professional practice) is to provide the framework and the guidance to enable you to: (A) Articulate a clearer sense of your educational mission; (B) Build a wealth of personal experience with the tools of reflective practice; (C) Employ the reasoning you deduce from your investigation to help achieve goals at Genesis.

The Concept

Any sort of learning, even the most narrowly restricted form of rote memorization, entails some sort of experience. So, what differentiates 'experiential' learning from any other type? A key differentiation is rooted in the process. Content oriented learning might be merely additive, which is to say, a process of adding more units of information to amass a larger 'catalogue' of entries. Experiential learning is an integrative process, through which learners construct meaningful knowledge. Rather than being measured in terms of test scores as an indication of one's command of a corpus of material, experiential learning is a matter of expanding one's zone of comfort with new ideas, mutual understanding, and actualizing potential through personal growth. The process does not end in operationalizing a specific lesson, because reflecting upon action provides an ongoing source for learning from experience. Ultimately, it is a continually transformative process.

Reflective practice is a thoughtful learning process predicated upon the assumption that we can find ways to consider and reconsider our actions in order to learn important lessons from experience. It is contrasted against the casual process of learning from experience,

relying on the hit or miss nature of impulsive behavior and the occurrence of coincidental realizations, which is rife with unexamined assumptions. An essential element of the successful application of reflective practice is to avoid merely rationalizing and justifying the assumptions that underly our actions.

Recognition of the possibility that assumptions can be misleading is not a justification for adopting a position at the opposite extreme; there is no reason to assume that everything or anything we do or believe is in some way wrong. Simply stated, people tend not to recognize the assumptive nature of their own understanding, particularly concerning those elements that serve as the foundation stones of our beliefs. Finding and examining those assumptions can lead to breakthrough transitions. The reflective investigation is a model for employing reflective thinking to explore complex situations. After gaining a deep understanding of the nature of an issue, it is possible to construct a problem-solving approach and put it into operation. Through attempts at resolving problematic issues, it is possible to gain further insight into the nature of learning from experience.

We have over a month to conduct these investigations. This is an ample amount of time to become familiar with the concept and to experiment in the laboratory of our learning community. Since elements of the model may at first seem counter-intuitive to many people, you can anticipate some challenging stages along the way. At the same time, you can find some reassurance in the fact that, as we develop the model from year to year, an increasing number of educators report experiencing positive results through this process. It is not intended for your investigation to be a polished piece of writing or even a completed study.

The idea is to gain familiarity with the conceptual material and the reflective practice 'toolkit,' and to begin experience the results in your own work. This is an opportunity for you to learn an approach that can enrich your work at Genesis. Then you can take what you have learned here, have it with you wherever you go and continue to develop your ability to learn from it.

The Six Stages of a Reflective Investigation

The anatomy of an investigation can be divided into six components, each of which requires a combination of careful observation, insightful thinking, and a willingness to innovate. The six categories represent overlapping elements, rather than a sequence with a beginning and a distinct endpoint. The process may begin with stage one and move toward stage six, but no stage is ever entirely complete. When it is time to move onto stage two and each of the subsequent stages, the previous stages remain in the background, occasionally to be brought into the foreground for refinement. Each stage has the potential to shed new light upon aspects of the previous stages. Reiterating your thinking about the early stages of the investigation offers the opportunity to dispel assumptions and reconsider how you will go about conducting the later stages.

The process of 'spiraling,' or continual reevaluation based on an increasingly large pool of information and relevant experience is known as 'iterative analysis.' Analyzing and re-analyzing your decisions, your actions, the results, and the potential ramifications of your actions, should be carried out concurrently within each stage of the process.

Stage 1: Identify an Issue.

Based on your demonstrated ability, your interests and your concerns as an educator, consider an array of topics and indicate why you think these topics would be appropriate for an investigation. Choose an issue that is in some way problematic, one with enough complexity that it requires some careful thinking. Make sure it is a problem that you can contend with, however, and one that you can address within the setting of your work. It is very important to choose an area of investigation through which you can build upon your previous successes. (If you adopt this approach and customise it to your needs, over time you may be able to apply it to more vexing problems, but your first investigation should not be the time you try to face your greatest challenges.)

Stage 2: Rely on intuition to help develop insight about the way things function.

We are often quick to look for readily acceptable explanations as to why our intentions and our plans work out the way they do (and sometimes don't end up going quite as we expect.) Pay attention to those feelings that reflect an uneasiness, a partially-defined thought that is difficult to articulate. When this happens, you may be onto discovering a flawed assumption. Sometimes you know something is amiss, and maybe even have a vague sense about what is wrong, but we often move too quickly to explain the feeling away, before we can carefully examine a situation. This sort of feeling may be a good indication that you have stumbled upon an issue worthy of further investigation, especially if other explanations don't lead to an effective solution.

It may seem that a partial explanation is better than no explanation at all, but it is also likely that an insufficient explanation is really is no explanation at all. Coming close to an answer, or what seems to be close, can create additional layers of problems. What is the price of wearing shoes that don't quite fit? Maybe it's better than no shoes at all, but how close is the fit? Your feet may begin to hurt; blisters, a sprained ankle, you have to slow down, and eventually you may not be able to walk. In that case a near fit could turn out to contribute to a more significant problem than the one you were trying to solve in the first place.

Why do we rely upon faulty explanations? Our normal response to feeling disoriented is to back up and look for something familiar to grasp for stability. In turning away from the difficulty, however, we may be missing an opportunity to confront a problem, rather than to avoid it. Instead of resolving the source of our disorienting experience, we often prefer to rely on a reassuring preconceived notion to rationalize it out of sight.

'Out of sight; out of mind' may help us to maintain our equilibrium, but it is like painting over water damage in a wall, preferring to think that the problem is merely discolored paint on the surface. If we really want to fix the wall, we need to find the source of the disfunction in the infrastructure of the building and correct the problem before it leads to a breakdown in structural integrity. If there seems to be something wrong, but you can't quite put your finger on it, try to focus clearly on the issues and design an investigation.

Stage 3: Map Out the Complexity of the Issue Under Investigation.

In order to gain a broad understanding of the interrelated aspects of your investigation, make lists or sketch a diagram of what you are observing. Don't be concerned with the

quality of your drawing. Just jot down some notes about what you actually observe through experience, such as events or discussions, and what you see through reflection on your observations. Try to understand the subtle complexity of the underlying assumptions⁴³ that have been rendered invisible by habitual behavior. When we manage to grasp essential characteristics of an issue, we can begin to question and consider whether it is either a cause or a symptom of a larger problem.

Stage 4: Substantiate Your Intuition.

This is the time to move from having a thought or a feeling about something, to collecting evidence through systematic observation. You may not be able to validate your inference to a scientific standard of certainty, but you may be able to attain a level of confident knowledge that contributes to a new understanding of the issue.

Stage 5: Develop a Complex Theory.

Now it's time to prepare for the transition from understanding something about your issue to doing something about it. A complex theory has three parts: it attempts to explain a phenomenon, it suggests possibilities for bringing about a desired effect, and it sets a course to do so. Together, the three components constitute a mechanism for creating a continual cycle of experiencing, explaining, speculating, and experiencing again.

Stage 6: Operationalize Your Confident Knowledge.

43 We discussed “hunting” three categories of assumptions: Paradigmatic assumptions appear to explain the nature of reality. Prescriptive assumptions explain the way one thinks things ought to be. Causal assumptions explain how things come to be as they are.

Once you can establish a level of confidence about your theory and the supporting evidence, you are better equipped to act thoughtfully in the practical realm and to design an innovation regarding the issue you have been investigating. This is an ongoing process that may take quite some time to fully implement, but already within the several weeks we have to work on this investigation, it may be possible to operationalize certain plans.

The Diagrams

I prepared the following series of diagrams as part of the presentation of Complex Reflective Practice, in preparation for the educator investigations. The pictures and the words became part of the common language we developed during the orientation as a working group and as a research team. Most of the educators' reflective investigations employed one or more of the diagrams or the accompanying explanations as reference points in the ongoing discussion between members of the team. Having a shared vocabulary and the ability to refer to familiar diagrams facilitated the process of identifying and discussing educational issues of common concern to the members of the group.

Five Reflective Lenses⁴⁴

Each of the following lenses, or frames of reference represents an approach to assimilating knowledge and understanding through recollection, consideration and reflection,

44 Four of the five depicted in this diagram were drawn from Brookfield (1995 *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, Jossey-Bass.) I added the fifth lens, cultural context, after a discussion with the educators participating in the professional development program discussed in section three.

in order to enhance one's ability to learn from various experiences. They are, *Autobiography*: Consider your own development through investigating your experiences as a teacher and as a learner. *Collegial Input* - You will be able to get input from three sources: your peers, supervisors and consultants. You have the opportunity to learn from their experience through observation, feedback and in various learning situations. *Cultural Context* - Being aware of the background, orientation of the participants, as well as the changing context of a situation may provide input that requires an insightful reconsideration of your course of action. *Participants' Perspective* - Make honest efforts to gain appropriate formal and informal feedback from participants in activities you facilitate (classes, discussions, organizational meetings, presentations.) *Theoretical Literature* - Expand conceptual perception through investigating theory.

Overuse of any one lens, or frame of reference, through which to interpret the world would skew one's perspective. Becoming familiar and comfortable with all five lenses enables a learner to avoid basing assumptions on limited input. To extend the metaphor, the five frames or reference can be combined into one multi-focal lens, offering the wearer quick access to various perspectives from which to look at a situation. As with actual multi-focal lenses, one develops the capacity to quickly shift perspectives.

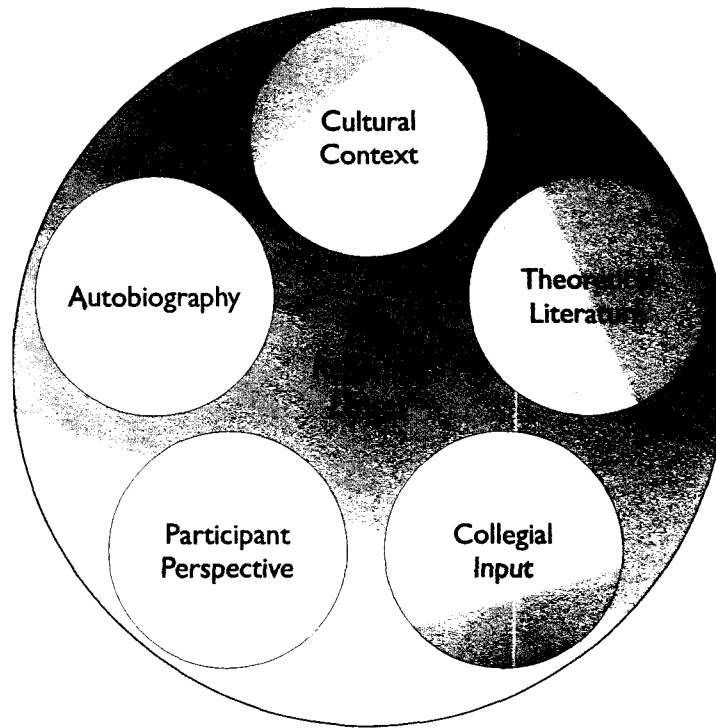
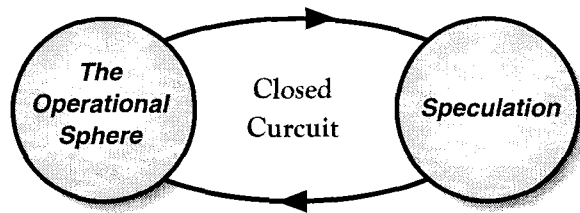


Diagram 4

“Closed-Circuit” Thinking versus “Open Source” Learning⁴⁵

Closed Circuit Thinking (as in closed circuit television) is a transmission system in which signals are sent over a closed loop from a specific point of input to a predetermined receiver. The closed circuit represents the process of acting according to one particular objective or governing principle. In this scenario, learning from experience leads to repeating or correcting an action in order to achieve a given objective. The approach will not change unless the process totally breaks down.

⁴⁵ Certain elements of this approach are loosely based on the theory of ‘double-loop learning,’ in Argyris & Schön, 1974.



Learning based on tactical considerations according to a single governing principle.

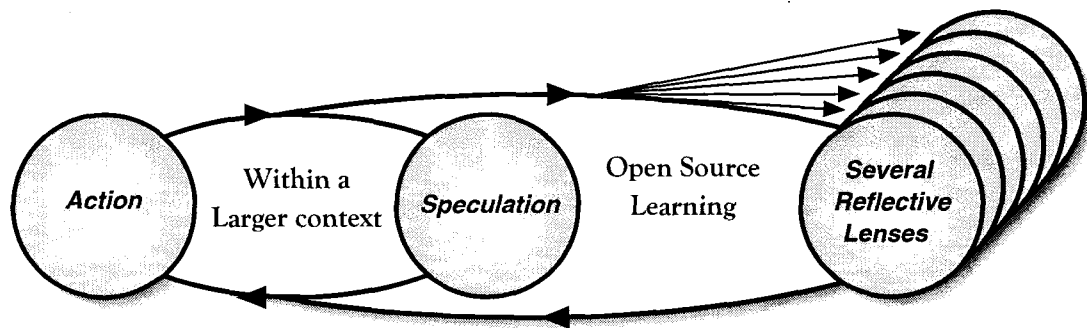
Diagram 5

According to this perspective, there is no need to consider alternate principles if a problem can be either corrected or tolerated. The search for answers to questions about the closed system does not go beyond the strict limitations of the system itself. Speculation is limited to maintaining function rather than considering the possibility of adaptation to additional or incompatible governing principles. The system becomes self-serving rather than focused on achieving goals beyond itself.

The simple system of turning a key in a lock, for instance, is used to immobilize or to operate a door knob. Someone planing on opening a door with a single governing principle in mind, or only one key, would focus on how to insert, turn or jiggle the key into place. Any one of a variety of reasons, however, or possibly a combination of several reasons, could necessitate more than the proper use of a single key in order to move from one room to another.

Open Source Thinking is an alternate approach that includes but is not limited to consideration of actions and their effects. It also entails reconsideration of the theoretical underpinning of actions. Most importantly, the information to consider is not limited to one closed-circuit, defined by a single governing principle. Open source thinking challenges the

learner to go beyond the limitations of preconceived notions and unfounded assumptions.



Complex learning based on a balance of speculation, experience and reflection.

Diagram 6

Opening a certain door might require a different key, an alternative technique, or accessing an additional lock. Solving the problem could require understanding something as complex as a biometric scanning device, or something as simple as clearing an entrance that is blocked by an object that jams the door in place. The seeker might need to find another door, enter through the window, get assistance or attain permission to enter. Critical thinking and the use of multiple reflective lenses can lead to a solution or to an improvement in the system before a breakdown occurs.

Encountering Diversity

Through embracing complexity and striving to understand the other, people can identify and achieve both personal and common goals, while accepting that others may have parallel or even contradictory values and goals. Difference need not necessarily give rise to intractable conflict if it can be maintained within a thinly conceived, yet widely accepted

commonality. It may be a compromise for some people to accept that they do not need to demand of one another that all agree on the greatest possible number of weighty issues, only on such an array of pivotal ideas that will guarantee that they can coexist, largely unfettered to pursue various lifestyles that do not bring people into direct confrontation with one another.

Diversity can be perceived to be a situation, a problem or an asset, depending upon the nature of relationships between people who identify as members of different groups. Such relationships might be characterized by violence, contention, mutual antipathy, tenuous compromises, tentative cooperation or productive collaboration. On one extreme, the “other” might be an enemy. On the other end of the spectrum, a member of a different group might be a desirable associate to the point of creating a union, a merger or a marriage. In between, there are various models of interaction. Diagram 6 presents five possible approaches to encountering diversity.

Five Approaches To Encountering Diversity

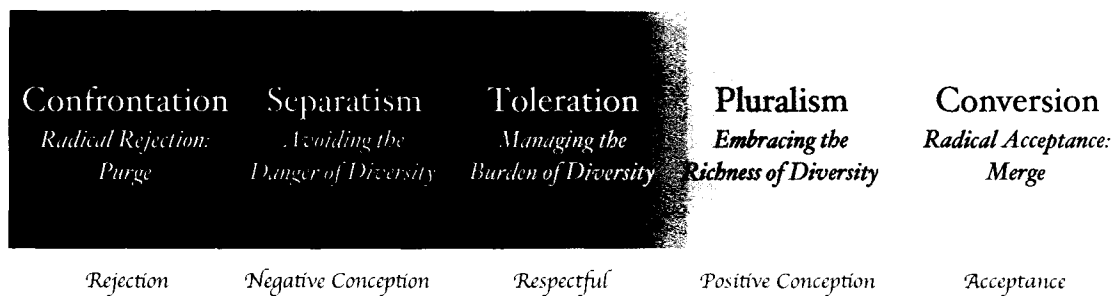


Diagram 7

Each of these categories is a frame of reference, or a lens, through which to perceive the

“other” under certain conditions. The extent to which people perceive an “other” as one of “us” or one of “them” will have an effect on one’s respect and even possibly one’s identification with the other on some level. If preserving the rights of individuals and groups is balanced with acceptance of the rights of the other, people can come to understand that they are part of more than one circle that should remain unbroken. Smaller circles might be characterized by multiple bonds, which connect people together very deeply. Other circles are much wider, and although the level of mutuality might be reduced by the wide variety of members of the circle, its strength will be found in the number of people who identify with the whole.

As with the multi-focal lens depicted in diagram 4 above, one can develop the capacity to shift perspectives and to choose how to perceive difference without basing views on preconceived notions.

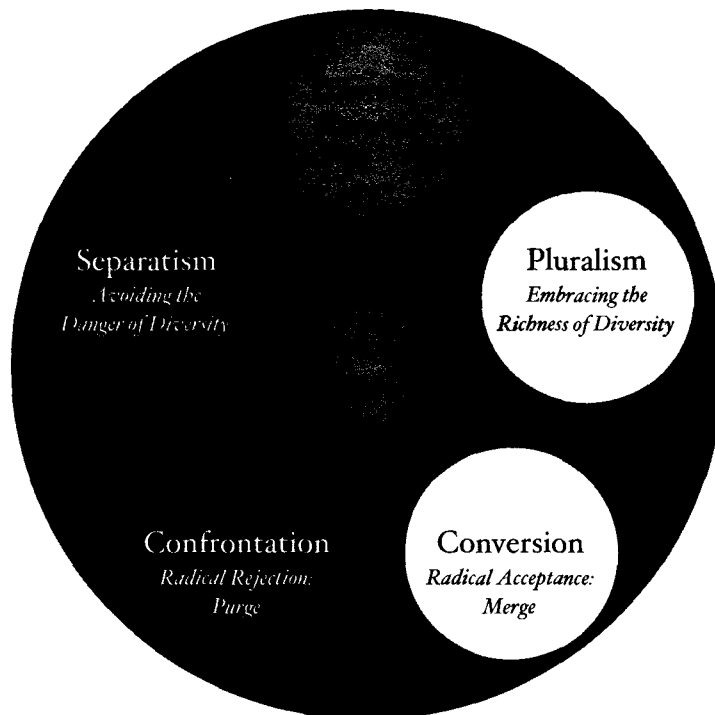


Diagram 8

The conceptual frames of reference detailed above were employed by the educators at Genesis within the framework of their educational activity in a diverse community of adolescent participants and in the reflective investigations carried out by the educators. The process of operationalizing the tools of reflective practice is detailed in the following section, which traces the work of the educators from before their arrival at Brandeis until the presentations of their reflective investigations.

3.3) Complex Reflective Practice in Operation

There were three components of experiential learning in which the educators engaged at Genesis. 1) The job for which they were hired gave them the responsibility of planning education programming, and much of the time they spent working together was devoted to developing engaging programming that would enable the participants to learn from their experience, grow and expand their capacity to impact the communities from which they came. 2) They learned to search for, recognize and examine assumptions and to evaluate them in order to ascertain their validity. 3) They became sensitized to the nature of relationships and cognizant, in particular, of the dynamic of the power relationships they experienced and witnessed. Many of the educators' reflective investigations focused on observing how people function in groups, navigate their encounters with diversity and grapple with authority. Some dealt with more concrete topics, such as various aspects of the nature of the process of working together, while others chose more abstract topics, such as interpreting the subtleties of feedback or finding one's voice as an educator.

The educators were quite receptive to each other's reflective investigations, although this often came as a surprise to CEs who assumed that their interest would not be shared by their colleagues. Most of their choices of topics, however, shared some elements of commonality to begin with and increasingly reflected elements of mutual influence as they progressed. Each educator investigation differed from the others in topic, tone and the choice of which reflective tools were employed, yet they all fit loosely together in an anthology of the study of relationships in experiential learning. Each of the resulting investigations offered a perspective on the whole project, but was also a magnification of an issue of particular concern to one of the educators on staff each summer. No two projects were ever particularly similar. I will return to a discussion of the results of the CEs reflective investigations after tracing the trajectory of the project.

While these investigations were at the heart of the project, a relatively limited amount of time could be devoted to them. The educators were, after all, employed to engage the teenage participants of the program, and the professional development was not intended to compete for their attention by drawing them away from their work with the teens. It was, on the contrary, focused on their work. Balancing the time available for their own learning with the responsibilities and the obligations of the community educators did present a challenge, but guided investigation in the workplace offered a very rich context for professional development. The value of the intervention was greatly enhanced because it was braided together with elements of teaching content and developing curricula designed to actively engage the participants in posing questions and solving problems.

Supporting the work of the educators by helping them to reflect on their practice was part of my job description from the outset of my time at Genesis. I aimed to understand the concerns of the educators, and to stimulate and support the expansion of their insightful thinking by providing them with a setting, a format, the time and the tools which they could use in ways that met their needs. This approach promoted their professional growth as learners in the context of becoming educator/investigators.

The idea of actually conducting educator research projects was at first rejected. The director and the lead educator were concerned that the educators were already too busy, and placing an additional task on their shoulders would be a burden, rather than a way of supporting their efforts. I met regularly with the group and individually with each educator each week, conducting my interventions that first summer in a highly personalized manner, somewhat spontaneously, discussing the issues that were personally important to each one.

I encouraged the educators to write about what we discussed in order to reflect more intentionally on their thoughts, but they were not asked to produce anything in particular according to any guidelines. We did conduct a session at the end of the summer to share thoughts on their reflections, but it was more of a personal summing up of the experience than anything else. Even so, the results were encouraging. After taking the time to discuss issues during the course of their work, develop the discussions as we went along and bring the process to a close, the senior staff members were left with the impression that we could achieve more by further structuring the project.

The second year was more structured, with sessions to present an approach to critical

thinking and reflective practice, as well as the expectation of some sort of project. The idea of the project, however, still registered as a potential burden to be regarded with caution. It was even suggested that we encourage them to express themselves in creative ways, possibly writing an essay or a poem, as opposed to a report, or making a collage that represented their experiences. While I was not opposed to any of these ideas in principle, to be perhaps included as part of a process, I was primarily interested in the articulation of the issues, and how I could help the educators to look critically into their experience. In so far as that was the goal, I was less concerned with enabling them to express themselves through the creative arts.

Each member of the staff conducted a personal project that second summer. There was a sense that these personal projects were intimate, that the educators would not be comfortable being open about their concerns, and that in order to focus upon the most important issue for each individual, it was necessary to be very discreet. I facilitated each educator's project in confidence, taking care not to make decisions regarding their choices of topic or methods of inquiry. In order that the educators not begin to feel vulnerable, I did not encourage them to share their work unless they personally chose to do so.

Over the years, in response to the experience of taking part in the process and reflecting upon it with the director and the lead educators each summer, we shifted away from 'personal' projects to 'individual' projects, then to 'critical reflective practice projects,' and finally to 'reflective investigations.' We shifted the emphasis from an individual to a collaborative endeavor, while all of the members of the group still had their own piece of the

overall project that increasingly became the focal point of their contribution to the group. As we did so, almost every investigation, while remaining an individual project with personal perspective, became more focused on what was happening in the staff and with the participants, as opposed to being primarily concerned with the issues each one brought with them to the setting. I continued to keep in confidence whatever I was asked not to mention to others, but I encouraged them to focus on issues that were appropriate for collaborative consideration. I always asked for permission to share anything from an individual's investigation before bringing it to the group.

Subtle power relationships were always present. At times they became an unbridled source of tension in the group. At times, attempting to ignore the existence or the influence of power had the effect of exacerbating the situation. As I pushed toward transparency in coping with the issues, difficulties between the staff members came to the surface in a more productive manner. The relationships, while still problematic, became more manageable, due in part to the shared language and to a common commitment to learn together and from one another, even in less than pleasant circumstances. We held a weekly staff meeting when the educators put their work with the participants aside in order to consider their work as members of their team. In doing so, not only did they become more aware and capable of coping, but they were gaining and applying skills that were equally useful in their work with the participants, be it in dealing with dorm issues or contentious discussions over personal beliefs about politics and religion.

What began as an approach to reflective practice became 'critical reflective practice,' as I

continued to understand the core issues through my work and through my continued reading. As the approach became more effective, it became more difficult to grasp. I was moving more deeply into the complexity of their power relationships and the process of identifying unfounded assumptions, and I was encountering more resistance along the way. After the fourth summer, I dropped the word 'critical' from my lexicon in working with the educators, even though I continued to conduct something which was dependent upon critical thinking, critical awareness and critical analysis - especially when it came to analysing the power relationships in the group. Up until that point I tried to redefine criticality with and for the educators, but I came to realize that the effort was time consuming and distracting, and that some of the CEs were still largely uncomfortable using that language. The connotation of the word 'critical' simply set too many people on edge, especially when they were taking the risk of looking at their weaknesses or the problems the group of educators faced together.

After the summer of 2005, I shifted to using the word 'complex,' which had already been in use to some extent. Rather than explaining that by 'critical understanding' I meant a grasp of the complex of related issues, I realized that 'complex' understanding would suffice and that 'Complex Reflective Practice' was a less threatening term for the uninitiated to digest. I also reexamined the model I presented looking to employ more straightforward language where I sensed or had received direct feedback to indicate that the ideas were difficult to grasp. The essentially complex aspects of the model needed to be clarified with examples and exercises in order to comprehend and operationalize the conceptual tools I presented. The

needlessly complicated explanations, however, had only to be simplified.

By 2006, the CRP model was a much less imposing and threatening approach, even though nothing of content or substance had been removed. Everyone got into their projects faster, with less resistance and expressed an interest in knowing about the others' investigations. Complex reflective practice became the strategy and method of working with the team of educators as a learning community. We developed a model that encouraged a great deal of collaborative learning and collaborative teaching. We began with the interview process, before the educators were hired, and ended with the post-program reporting on the educator investigations after the program ended. The approach yielded greater mutual understanding among the practitioner/investigators, individually and for the group of colleagues as a whole.

The work that gave rise to the culmination of my research was a matter of clarifying a complex picture. Not only did I need to focus intently upon what I was observing, but I had to be confident that I was not merely seeing what I chose to see. It was inherently possible that my interpretations would be grounded on the assumptions with which I entered the investigation or in misconceptions I developed along the way. Because it is unlikely that my observations could be entirely free of the limitations or the distortions of my perspective, I needed not only to see the picture, but to clarify it as well. In order to compensate for the possibility of error, I tested and refined the theory over a period of five years in my work with over seventy practicing educators.⁴⁶

46 The total number of educators with whom I worked closely from 2002 to 2006 at Genesis included both

I originally encountered significant resistance during the implementation of the professional development program, and in spite of a few key successes, I observed that other educators did not employ the reflective learning tools very effectively. The beginning was promising, but also frustrating for some of the educators and for me as a facilitator. It was suggested to me that we might get better results with a project that had less ambitious goals. That was logical enough, but I was already fairly confident about the content of the intervention, and I hoped that effective methods could lead to achieving more ambitious goals.

I learned from my experience each year by employing the same tools that I was introducing to the educators. I honed the tools, and created a clearer, more comprehensive user manual in the form of written material, including diagrams and illustrative examples from our previous experience at Genesis. My one-on-one meetings with the educators became more focused on their issues and less weighed down by my explanations. Spending the time and effort in search of ways to understand and resolve problems allowed me to develop more refined methods of collaboration. This enabled me to become adept at facilitating the process of conducting reflective investigations that led to outcomes that were useful at Genesis. Considering the trajectory of my work with the educators over the years, I have become increasingly effective in this endeavor. I base this evaluation on the increasingly

the Course Instructors and the Community Educators. Each group was responsible for different elements of the program. My responsibilities included various aspects of pre-program preparation and collaboration during the summer with all of them. The instructors, however, did not participate in the formal in-service professional development intervention in Complex Reflective Practice, which was a program for the Community Educators.

valuable output of the professional development program as well as the feedback, both formal and informal, of the educators.⁴⁷ The issues were not limited to the specific setting in which they were attained; they are therefore likely to continue to be useful in the future for all of those of us who were involved.

When the educators presented their projects to the group, they shared the questions they raised at the outset and the ones they uncovered as they progressed. All of the CEs were somewhat familiar with their colleagues investigations at this point, having participated in earlier sessions during which all of the educators made interim presentations on their topics and the progress of the investigations. Each presentation was approximately fifteen to twenty minutes in length, often including electronic presentations, diagrams or illustrative exercises, as well as a narrative description of the process and the product of the investigation. Each was followed by discussion of about the same length, in which the research team engaged in discussion to clarify questions that remained or to speculate as to what further inquiry might reveal.

If the educators had been students in graduate seminar each investigation could have led to a literature review and an academic paper. It was helpful, in some cases, to offer an educator an article that effectively articulated an issue, but I generally preferred not to do so.

47 Here is one example among many, drawn from the educators end-of-summer evaluations: "1. Please comment on the Wednesday reflective practice staff meetings." Response: "Generally loved these meetings. [They] were a way of calibrating my work to hold it up to the standards that I and Genesis wanted from it. I valued this hugely as normally this is only done at the end of programs. It is something I hope to take with me and look for ways to implement in my future experiences." (D.B. '06) Some of the CEs preferred the staff meeting to the one-on-one setting, and vice-versa. For the most part, everyone participated actively in both.

Due to their work-related time constraints, and because of the limited duration of the project each summer, I encouraged them to harvest as much as they could from their own experience and from their collaboration with the other CEs. The purpose of the intervention was not to produce written research, but to enhance their professional capacity through facilitated reflection on their work. The focus was upon learning from their experience in the field and as members of an investigation team.

There were over thirty-five educators who participated in the in-service professional development program in Complex Reflective Practice that I designed and facilitated at Brandeis University's Genesis Program. The investigations explored a long list of issues, including: various aspects of the professional relationships among the educators, working with the director, authority and influence with respect to the adolescent participants, tension between groups and individuals, working styles and accommodating each other's capacities and deficiencies, interpreting feedback, evaluation techniques, finding one's voice as an educator, scaffolding and the transference of knowledge, the nature of experience, finding the appropriate balance between goals, content and methodologies.

Many of the educators submitted five to fifteen page printed copies of the reports on their reflective investigations. The projects generally included sections on the rationale for their choice of topic, the methodology they chose to employ from the array of reflective frames of reference presented and discussed during their pre-Genesis preparation, findings, qualitative data analysis, discussion and diagrams describing the relationships they explored. Nearly all of them agreed to have their final presentations to the team of Community

Educators recorded on video tape. The collection of Genesis Community Educator reflective investigations provides an informal anthology of practitioner/researcher explorations of the the nature and the practice of experiential learning.⁴⁸

In some cases the educators investigated issues they brought with them to Genesis, while others developed their questions in response to their experiences early in their summer at Brandeis. Some concluded that they were engaged in analyzing the workings of common sense, although what is referred to as 'common sense' is often the subject of discussion because people are in disagreement about what ought to be agreed upon. When educators referred to the results of their investigations as obvious or common sense, I would ask if what they discovered was obvious or common to them before they began, or if they thought that all of their colleagues would have agreed that the questions they raised and the answers they found were mundane. They agreed that people who had not engaged in the process would not be likely to attain the same understanding of their topics. Stepping back for a moment from their work, the educators would see how uncommon their newly attained 'common sense' really was. Many of the educators reported gaining a greater grasp of what they previously thought they understood. A few of the CEs described the process as having been significantly transformative in their own development as educators.

Each project was brought to a close less than six weeks from the introduction of the assignment to the presentation of the findings. In some cases, the educators had only

48 The educators' reports on their reflective investigations, the videotaped presentations and their written evaluations of the program are in the possession of the author, and they are on file at the Genesis office.

preliminary findings, having devoted most of the time they could spend on their investigations to the conceptual stage, reframing the way they looked at their work. In other cases, there were CEs who took to the project rather quickly and began applying their initial understandings earlier on in the summer, allowing them to move farther along in the stages of the project. In all cases, the reflective investigations were rough and ready research, brimming with intuition and insight, unfinished, and, for the most part, unfettered by efforts to straighten the lines or smooth the edges. The CEs generated deep and probing discussions, and they often left Brandeis registering surprise in their written evaluations at how much they had gained as professionals in the course of less than two months.

Conclusion of Part III

All of the Community Educators appropriately assumed that they were supposed to be cooperating and that effective cooperation would be rewarded in the system within which they were each a significant element. Benefitting from the reciprocity that developed among the team of educators also entailed managing to navigate the unspoken competitive interplay. As became increasingly clear, most if not all of them also shared an assumption that competition among them was inevitable and even perhaps unreconcilable. This was expressed through behavior that was often present and at times highly active. Because the root causes of certain contentious relationships were obscured, the ability to grasp the significance of what was happening in the staff was often beyond the comprehension of those involved, whether it was a mere misunderstanding or strife that led people to refuse to

work with one another and brought people to tears on occasion. Managing to cooperate within this subtly competitive environment emerged as a matter of great concern to the educators, although this issue was not explicitly articulated until problems began to surface. Once they did, however, there were times when the environment became overtly competitive, and several of the CE's investigations shifted to reflect the contentious issues the experienced.

There were competitive instances wherein divergent working styles or differing goals, for example, were at the heart of an issue. There were other times when the competition was personal, between individuals or groups which formed in the staff on the basis of the educators' identification with a particular side in a dispute. In such instances, the competition seemed especially destabilizing because any attempt to deal with it reinforced and potentially exacerbated contentious personal relationships. Issues of little or no significance may have run their course without incident, but in matters of substance the pressure built up, in some cases leading to explosive encounters. In either case, matters that became systemic reduced the operating capacity of the staff, as energy was diverted to navigating the rough current rather than moving swiftly toward goals. Resolution of the tension was facilitated through transparent grappling with the often concurrent elements of cooperation and competition.

Problematic aspects of the inner workings of the staff dynamic often came up in my one-on-one meetings with each of the educators. In response, I raised issues in our weekly team meetings that were relevant to everyone for examination and discussion. Openly identifying impediments to collective success lead to more productive collaboration. One

goal of the weekly meetings was to keep the collaborative process on track, while a concurrent goal was to provide each individual with the opportunity both to receive input on his or her investigation and to offer feedback to the others. The less assertive members of the staff learned that their insights and their contributions were important to the group, while the more powerful members learned the value of limiting their influence and becoming more receptive to their colleagues who were often overshadowed.

The Community Educators began their work with the default assumption that working relationships could be characterized as either competitive or cooperative. This, however, proved to be a simplistic misinterpretation of their complex encounters. Several of their investigations controverted that assumption, demonstrating that both forces were always present, albeit in various manifestations and in varying degrees of intensity. Even when they were striving to cooperate effectively, there were elements of competition that were overriding their best intentions. Their common misreading of the situation can be attributed, in part, to a tendency to see binary patterns of behavior in which either one or another variable is assumed to be the sole governing principle of a system. The investigations revealed subtle intricacies of highly nuanced systems, with multiple variables simultaneously at work.

Neither ignoring problems in the group dynamic nor concentrating on their productive efforts brought about the desired amelioration during periods of tension between members of the team. The natural order of a diverse collection of individuals coming together to form a cohesive group includes elements of both cooperation and competition. Fixing the

problems that were endemic to the environment required paying attention to them, rather than relegating them to the background or denying their significance. In order to collaborate effectively, the educators had to learn not only how to cooperate, but also how to compete openly and fairly, to determine and follow ground rules, to work within the group and not against it.

In terms of the tools of reflective practice that the educators were learning to use, there was a discrepancy between the overarching espoused theory of cooperation and a competitive theory-in-use. The unfounded yet commonly held assumption was that cooperation and competition exist in a zero-sum relationship; either one or the other would prevail. There were, indeed, times when either one or the other clearly seemed more prevalent in a particular situation. But there was another, more subtle aspect of the relationship between cooperation and competition at play in the functioning of the staff. Attempting to focus on cooperation while not recognizing the presence of competition was less effective than developing a mechanism for coping with the competitive aspects of learning to work together. Whereas undisciplined competition often coincided with ineffective cooperation that soured personal and work relationships, becoming cognizant of the elements of competition and harnessing them to the common goals led to effective cooperation, the ability to move forward together and the satisfaction that comes with success of the team.

The successful educators, those who managed to work effectively with their peers, avoid burnout and develop meaningful relationships with the participants, understood that they

could neither lead effectively through dominating the group nor function sufficiently well by becoming independent of the team. Through embodying the values of accepting the presence and the contributions of the other in a diverse community and learning about oneself through the eyes of the other, the CEs formed the nucleus of the Genesis community. The element of learning and teaching by personal example enabled the educators to design and facilitate effective activities for the adolescent participants. Educators who were engaged in being members of a diverse community were able to help the participants explore the contributing factors as well as the impediments to community building across lines of difference.

Conclusion

The nature of cultural transmission maintains continuity and stability in society through the systematic reproduction of patterns of behavior, including factors that reinforce identity and community as well as those that entrench inequity through irreciprocal power relationships. I set out to clarify the complex mechanisms of cultural transmission and to enhance effective collaboration among educators in order to promote emancipatory learning. I adopted and adapted certain reflective and critical thinking concepts, discovered connections between them in some cases and fashioned additional tools as needed. I then designed, implemented and refined an intervention in a practical educational setting. The educators in the in-service professional development program in Complex Reflective Practice demonstrated that attaining a critical understanding of complex issues can elucidate aspects of the process of social reproduction.

Balancing continuity and change through critical, reflective thinking serves to enhance the potential of an educational framework to promote transformational, emancipatory learning. In my work with the community educators at Brandeis University's Genesis program, we engaged members of a diverse group in learning to evaluate elements of their own culture. The educators formed a small, adult learning community. They, in turn, devised educational programming designed to enable adolescent learners to explore aspects of identity, culture and social responsibility. The youths were encouraged to consider how they

can intentionally promote the values they prioritized and work to ameliorate situations in their communities which they determined to be in need of change.

I developed some of the particular insights and understandings included in this investigation through a series of collaborations with the educators with whom I worked at Genesis. Facilitating their reflective investigations enabled me to operationalize the ideas about which I had speculated and proposed certain explanations. I refined both the speculation and the explanation through the process of operationalizing the concepts. Had my colleagues been less insightful or had they chosen to focus on different issues, my attempt to understand the educator's condition would likely have been influenced differently. Similarly, if another facilitator were to make use of the reflective tools, the results would reflect the particular collaboration between that facilitator and those educators.

A composite of the results of reflective investigations conducted by a larger number of educators in collaboration with several facilitators could offer a fuller picture of the essence of experiential learning through Complex Reflective Practice. Indeed, this scenario has already begun to emerge from the original project. Educators who participated in investigations which I facilitated have become facilitators of the process for other educators, as illustrated in part three. A version of the project I developed and implemented from 2002 to 2006 was facilitated in 2007 by one of the educators who had participated in the program, led the educational team, facilitated the reflective practice projects of the interns and went on to become the associate director of the program with responsibility for the in-service professional development program.

The essence of Complex Reflective Practice is that educators become practitioner/investigators in their own environment. The focus on the nature of learning in their workplace expands from the limitations of practical knowledge, lesson planning and classroom management, to encompass a search for emancipatory knowledge about why things are the way they are and how they can be different. The participants learn to identify issues worthy of investigation, uncover and evaluate the validity of their own assumptions, expand their potential to apply the insight they gain from the observation and analysis of their experience, and then act to resolve problematic issues. CRP provides a systematic approach to developing a capacity for change agency.

The complex approach to reflective learning and teaching that I implemented at Genesis is not dependent upon the particular cultural context within which I worked. I engaged in an exploration of that which is most familiar and meaningful to me in order to better understand the effects of some of the social and cultural assumptions I have perhaps internalized to the point where I did not consider their effects upon my understanding and my behavior. Recognizing assumptions and learning to grasp the significance of the ramifications of a system functioning on the basis of unfounded principles is a critical step toward embracing the full complexity of a context. I offer this analysis of my experience and the interpretation of my cultural background as contexts that might resonate with the experience and the cultures of others. They are examples of the application of Complex Reflective Practice, not imperatives or prerequisites. I would recommend for others who are drawn to this approach to use the reflective lenses in order to peer more deeply into their

own worlds of meaning, as well as—if not instead of—attempting to enter mine.

That which is learned through experience cannot be fully understood through explanation alone. Had I not experienced the challenge of making sense of theory within the framework of searching for resolutions to the actual issues I faced, I would not have developed this particular set of reflective tools. It is necessary to become enmeshed in the thicket of a complicated situation in order to grasp the complexity of learning reflectively from experience. Now that I have arrived at a richly contextualized explanation, my attempt to convey experience through narrative and diagrams remains, at best, only an introduction to the transformative power of experiential learning. An authentic understanding can come only through the experience of grappling with transformation itself.

Appendices

Genesis Documents

Appendix A: Genesis Senior Educator Job Description⁴⁹

The senior educator is responsible to take the lead in the collaborative effort of developing a coherent and consistent conceptual underpinning which provides a foundation for the educational work at Genesis. The senior educator, working closely with the director, the staff of community educators, and members of the course faculty, is integral to all educational aspects of the program, including curriculum design during the year, facilitation of the training and in-service professional development and problem-solving during the summer, and evaluation and planning for reiteration from year to year.

As the coordinator of the major course faculty, the senior educator is integrally involved in creating and participating in the development of new courses, observes sessions of all courses, meets with instructors to discuss the progress of classes and to collaborate with them on ways they can bring their professional experience to Genesis in accord with the broader goals of the program.

49 This 2006 job description, which I wrote in collaboration with the director of the program, evolved over a number of years. When I left the program the responsibilities outlined here were divided between the director and the incoming associate director, a new position which was filled by an educator who had participated in each of the previous iterations of the professional development program in reflective practice. During those years, she served as educator, lead educator and intern coordinator with responsibility for a scaled-down version of the reflective practice program which she conducted with the interns. The associate director assumed responsibility for the community educators reflective practice program in 2007.

As a resource for the educators, the consultant is an active member of the training team. Although he may on occasion be involved in the implementation of programming with the Genesis participants, his role on the staff is to serve as an in-house educational consultant, working with the educators individually and as a group.

There are three basic goals of the approach:

1) To augment the ability of the educators to develop intrinsically meaningful learning experiences for the participants of the program that will encourage independent, reflective and critical thinking about their identity and their role in the various communities in which they interact with others;

2) To enhance the efforts of the individual educators by providing a framework within which they can contribute to and enjoy the benefits of participating in a vibrant learning community that becomes the core around which the Genesis community is built each summer;

3) To contribute to minimizing and ameliorating the potentially divisive or otherwise problematic tensions, including issues of alienation, competition and authority among the staff, as well as between adults and adolescents.

The Senior Educator is well placed to facilitate cross-pollination and collaborative experiences between the instructors of the various courses, as well as between the course and the various components of community education in the program.

Appendix B: The Community Educator (CE) Position at Genesis⁵⁰

The Genesis CEs are responsible for creating a safe space in which all participants feel comfortable expressing their ideas, opinions, and practices. The CEs are accessible residential staff. In addition to planning and implementing programming, they work, travel, eat and live in the dorms with the participants. They have the opportunity to develop relationships, gain a deep and broad awareness of and involvement in the daily lives and the social dynamics of the participants. CEs play a key role fostering a socially and educationally challenging environment, for both the educators and the participants.

The CE position has three main emphases, which are all necessary facets of one integrated approach to experiential learning. They are not the same, but neither can they be separated one from another. When one aspect is ignored or under-emphasized, the others are diminished as well. Some of the elements are common to two or three of these areas.

1) A Focus on the Participants

The focus on the participants begins with a concern for their transition to the new social environment and their general well being. It includes modeling the behavior of encountering and striving to understand others. Through leading by example, the CEs engage the participants in building a pluralistic learning community.

Key elements in the focus on the participants include:

- Group Facilitating
- Accessibility (In and around the dorms, during meals and unstructured time)
- Addressing Health Issues
- Check-In (Afternoons and Curfew)
- Create an environment within which participants can expand their comfort zones.

50 This job description was distributed at the orientation seminar for community educators at Genesis.

- Collaboration and Communication

2) *A Focus on Programming (Development and Facilitation)*

Educational programming at Genesis is dynamic, complex and labor intensive. There are a variety of educational frameworks (Shabbat, Explorations, Community Service...) Some of these frameworks are defined prior to the beginning of the summer while the educators have responsibility for the creation of curricula for other key components of the program.

Opportunities and structures for effective reflection are central to successful collaboration.

Key elements of the focus on programming include:

- Planning an exploration
- Facilitating an exploration
- Planning for Shabbat
- Facilitating Shabbat
- Create an environment within which participants can expand their comfort zones.
- Collaboration and Communication

3) *A Focus on Professional Development*

The CEs function as research group studying their practice as individuals and as a group working at Genesis. We will be concerned with issues common to all of us, and each member will cultivate an area of inquiry for a reflective investigation.

Key elements of the focus on professional development include:

- Formulating and pursuing a reflective investigation
- Create an environment within which participants can expand their comfort zones.
- Collaboration and Communication

Appendix C: The Culminating Project at Genesis

Preparing the culminating project for a course at Genesis bridges the familiar and the unfamiliar. It is intended to be an experience that touches the participants personally yet draws them away from their routine. Ideally, it should be authentic, intrinsically interesting learning that reflects the content and the atmosphere developed together by teachers who are also learners and learners who become teachers.

1. The project should require that the participants exercise their abilities to move beyond the familiar.
 - A routine effort might set the stage for “success,” but not for an authentic sense of significant achievement. More of the same sort of projects and learning they already know could bore them and eventually produce frustration.
 - Ideally, the experience of climbing to a new plateau and seeing that they are capable of doing more than they previously had known will reinforce their willingness to try and integrate what they have learned into their lives at home—perhaps even in spite of a calculated risk of failure.

2. Your expectations for the participants should be within their existing capacity.
 - If a project requires people to over reach their abilities, they will become frustrated. They might attempt something unrealistically difficult to achieve in the time frame of the program or reject the project for fear of “failing” to rise to your expectations.
 - Even if they manage something, it won’t be their most effective work; they will only succeed if they manage to reorient the project to their abilities.

- If they have to solve a problem that is too difficult, they'll have no choice but to revert to the tools, ideas and solutions with which they are already familiar. In other words, their choices would be limited to what they knew before they started working on the project, perhaps even before they participated in the course. Being able to choose “anything” (without your direction and assistance) therefore would actually limit their freedom of choice.
- You can't be sure about their abilities in advance, but if you are aware of the significance of this point, you can be conscious of the need to exercise your best judgement. You can, of course, solicit the feedback of other instructors and educators who have been at Genesis.

3. The participants should have a creative, reflective role in creating, designing, defining and executing the project. Identify where they can take initiative in learning and making choices.

- In what ways will they be able to teach what they have learned to the Genesis community (and hopefully be able to continue in their home communities if they choose to do so.)
- It is not a test, or a method to evaluate independent work as might be appropriate in a course where students would be expected to apply what they have learned to an individual project of their own.

4. The culminating project should be an effort of joint learning for the instructors

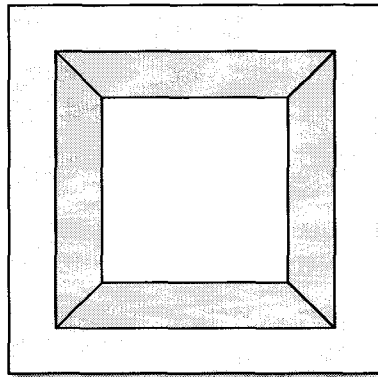
and the participants.

- The project is an integral element of the process of cooperative learning.
- It should grow out of a synthesis of the content of the course and the creative abilities of the participants, both the teachers (who are also learners) and the learners (who also become teachers.)
- Your plan should be flexible enough so that you can modify it when you become more familiar with the participants. It should only assume its final design in coordination with the participants.
- Stay involved by design. Although they may or may not execute the actual program without your participation, it should not be “their” project as opposed to “yours.”
- Ideally the participants will feel internally committed to the decisions they freely make.
- The participants are more likely to adopt greater responsibility over an experience that is intrinsically satisfying and interesting, rather than one for which they can earn an external reward or punishment, such as a competition, a grade or an evaluation.

Appendix D: Participant Explorations at Genesis⁵¹

Creating a ‘Well-Framed Empty Space’

We have designed guidelines to support your entry into a dynamic framework. Now that you are here — because you are here — the framework has begun to change. It will expand and then fade into the background as a new framework emerges within it. That new framework, the one we will design together, will also have space for the participants to join us in creating the Genesis community. They too will influence the nature of the expanding framework, which will in turn fade into the background as the community takes shape and begins to develop its evolving character that will again redefine the framework. Within that framework, the participants will contribute to crafting their own experiences.



What is in the space? What surrounds and defines it? What is beyond the space?

The space within the framework you design should present a liberating opportunity to

51 Explorations were planned during the staff orientation week and refined during the first week of the Genesis program. They were implemented during the second week of the program. Each exploration team worked with half of the participants, learned from their experience, reiterated their plans and subsequently implemented the program a second time with the other half of the participants.

the participants to avail themselves of your guidance yet be able to take on the responsibility to define their own experience.

We are about to make a significant transition.

Up until this point, we have been creating a space for you in the programs we have facilitated.⁵² Your role has been to fill the space with meaning. From this point onward, we are including you in the role of creating the framework. This morning it would have been easy to walk into the room and identify who was facilitating and who was participating. Tomorrow, it won't be so clear. While we will remain available and sometimes active participants in the process, much of the decision-making will be in your hands. We'll all be listening and learning together, offering feedback, working in our different capacities, collaborating to generate and implement the programming for the first week, for Shabbat and for the explorations. We will devote time to each of these areas of the program, beginning now with the Explorations.

What is an Exploration?

These are the predetermined elements of the exploration framework: The six of you will choose two topics that have to do with exploring what it means to be a member of a diverse community. Two groups of three educators will create a succession of five programs. Each team will implement their exploration during the second week of the program for half of the

52 The reference to "we" is to the director and to the senior educator, who facilitated the staff orientation. This document and the responsibility for planning explorations was introduced on the third day of orientation, creating a shift of responsibility for conducting the programming from the initial situation in which the organizers led sessions for the staff to a model of shared responsibility among a team of interdependent colleagues.

participants, and then again during the third week, for the other half.

What Makes an Exploration Successful?

In a word, ‘engagement’... from start to finish. The theme is obviously important. There are many ways to explore diversity, but whatever you choose, consider the extent to which adolescents are likely to be intrinsically curious about the topic. The methodologies are critical; you should be looking for activities to which the participants will be drawn in to the doing, as well as the listening. More than anything else, we want you to be deeply engaged in the process. Your excitement will be contagious. From the beginning of the planning to the end of the last activity, you should be asking yourselves: How do we get these bright kids who are full of potential to engage and to encounter one another... to explore what it means to become? Ask yourselves: ‘What can I learn from this project about my own abilities and limitations?’ And, ‘How can I be a contributing member of this learning community so that my colleagues will also feel comfortable learning and growing in this environment?’

8 key qualities to aim for in your planning:

A successful exploration...

1. ... will be enjoyable, creative and challenging.
2. ... will draw upon the intrinsic curiosity of the participants and speak to their interests. Participants should be able to see how and why the exploration is relevant to their lives. The participants should be able to bring their previous experience to bear upon their learning at Genesis.

3. ... will be conceptualized as an attempt to meet the participants where they are (in terms of comfort, familiarity, knowledge and expectations) and to promote their interest in coming together to learn from their common experience. Ideally, participation in the process will enable the learners to expand their zone of comfort and familiarity with people and ideas that are beyond the pale of their usual experiences.
4. ... should investigate some aspect(s) of the interactions and the tensions with respect to how individuals function within communities.
5. ... will enhance the participants' appreciation of their environment and enable them to think about why things are as they are and how they might be different.
6. ... raise questions about the role they might play in moving from the observed world to a more desirable reality. Presenting problems which need to be solved or tensions that need to be resolved are effective ways of doing this.
7. ... accommodate learning together with (not only from) the educators.
8. ... will be a reflection of what you bring to the program as well as a reflection of what you understand Genesis to be.

See this as a working draft of the essential qualities of a successful Exploration. As you read it and then get involved in the planning, you may want to revise and expand the list. We can revisit the list as we get deeper into the planning process.

Beyond Explorations⁵³

Planning The Fourth Week: *Toward Interdependence*

- *Frame I* - During the orientation, we spoke of “well-framed empty spaces” as a way of explaining how we create the atmosphere for the development of a community of learners.

At that point, the frame was defined for you, and you began to fill the space that was created for you. We began to understand more about the individuals who comprise a group of thirteen, each with our various roles. We made decisions about who should be on which team, how to offer support, how to help you navigate the journey of the individual investigations, and we learned from our experience how to improve the process each step of the way. We are still learning and updating our approach to planning, implementing, assessing, observing, offering feedback and collaborating.

- *Frame II* - The participants entered Genesis as learners dependent upon the staff for everything from their room key and food card to the schedule and programming. As they became familiar with the setting and built relationships, they also became learner/teachers in

53 The exploration planning began before the participants arrived, and then the educators had the opportunity to fine tune their plans as they came to know the participants who would fill the space planned for them in the explorations. The community education program for the final week of four, however, was not planned in advance of the summer. We began this process by introducing and discussing this document “Beyond Explorations” only at the outset of the third week, when the educators were quite familiar with the setting and its social landscape. At this point in the program, it was already clear to the educators that the participants needed much less framework and much more space to express themselves, than would have been able to understand or define for themselves at the outset of the program. A relative few would assert themselves and come forward to define their experience at the beginning of the program, when all of the participants were still strangers to one another. By the fourth week, however, a relative few would remain on the periphery when given the opportunity to participate actively.

the community. They “taught” each other (and you) about themselves, and quickly took responsibility for a good deal of Shabbat programming, for instance. How else did you see them fill the space?

- *Frame III* - During the second week, the nature of the frame, the space and the many relationships that increasingly defined the setting continued to evolve. The previous frame faded into the background as you assumed your roles in the exploration planning teams and contributed to the shape of Genesis '06. The participants began to fill the space provided for them. By the end of the first iteration of explorations, the educators limited the dimensions of the framework and opened up a wider empty space for the participants to fill with their creativity and their personalities. As you became familiar with the environment and built relationships amongst yourselves and with the participants, you became teacher-learners, dependent in-part upon them to figure out how to plan appropriately. In doing so, you are also learning about various aspects of collaboration and initiative, about how to enable the participants to raise their awareness and about working together to build a community. They have taken significant responsibilities within the explorations, their courses, Shabbat planning, community service and during the course integration evening.

- *Frame IV* - Now you are in the midst of the third week of the program, taking advantage the opportunity to learn from your experience and implement a second iteration of the explorations you created. The frame continues to change, and you are all more focused on getting the participants to fill the space. We have perhaps only sampled the potential for

learning from our experience, assessing our accomplishments and reorienting ourselves in line with our clarified goals. There is always room for improvement, and we have had opportunities to do some fine-tuning.

- *Frame V* - During the fourth week of the program, we want to create a framework for the participants to become part of the framing process, through which we will all fill in the empty spaces together, as teacher/learners who have achieved a high level of interdependence.

The Task

Genesis is about impacting the way we think, learn and participate – here and beyond the temporary community we create together. The fourth week serves as a bridge back to our home communities and to communities we have yet to experience. During the last week of the program each of us (participants and educators) will engage in an exploration to answer the question, “What are we taking away from Genesis?” This third sequence of exploration programming will provide a framework for reflecting on what we have experienced and continue to experience together.

Preliminary Guiding Questions (which we can change):

What have you learned over the summer?

Have you learned in ways that you did not anticipate?

Have you learned from people you did not anticipate learning from?

The Plan

We need to define how we will frame the empty spaces in the fourth week of Genesis. We can be creative with our use of time for the yellow “Final Week Programs” blocks in the schedule. The only pre-existing expectation is that the CEs and the participants will collaborate in some meaningful way to generate the programming together. As we continue to explore the diversity of our community, we will continue to discover more about each other and about ourselves.

Appendix E: Generative Modeling

Generative modeling describes educational practice that is designed and implemented to effectively spawn the work of others in such a manner that learners go beyond the scope of the models of their teachers. Demonstrations offer windows onto techniques and methodologies, yet they are not intended to delineate the borders of how an example might be followed. "Following" an example, then, does not necessarily mean traversing the same territory. It is not enough to say, "You might want to do it this way ..." and assume that a learner will go on to be fully creative, looking at the example as merely a suggestion. Some learners might get the message in the way it is intended, but I have also observed the following outcomes:

- 1) Some experienced people lack confidence in going beyond their sphere, explicitly or implicitly rejecting a threat to their routine.
- 2) Some people add a new idea or technique to the usual selection from which they draw, but they adopt an idea that fits well with their existing routine, rather than an innovation that presents a real challenge. Without proper guidance, they are likely to continue to do what they already do well and continue to fall short where they already have.
- 3) Some people are confident, but unaware of the effort needed to truly transform their approach. They over-extend and try something too far out of their sphere of experience. Upon running into difficulties, they blame the approach rather than their lack of preparation.
- 4) Some will be convinced to follow an example, but be very conservative about replicating

the experience they had, rather than integrating it into their ability to plan creatively. Unless a teacher is very clear that the process of modeling is designed to generate further thinking, some learners are likely to hear, “This is the way I think it should be done, and, therefore, it is the way you should do it.” Teachers who intend to promote creative and original thinking may not be cognizant of the possibility that students might hear what they say yet internalize a message that completely inverts their intention. When a student has been trained to follow examples by replicating, it may not be in their nature to follow an example by generating a different result. As such, they are likely to hear, “This is just one way to do; you can come up with your own model” and assume that to mean, “Since this is the way to do it, your work will be evaluated by means of a comparison with my example.”

In order to avoid training people to repeat what they have learned as closely as possible, without straying from the examples of their teachers, mentors must avoid the temptation to condition their protégés to imitate too closely. It is true that following in the footsteps of another can offer comfort and confidence, and it is important for people to feel supported and appreciated. If ideas are to develop according to the broadest possible interpretations, with the widest applications and through a wealth of creative means, however, an integral part of the modeling process must be to encourage and to enable initiates to go off on their own, confident in their own ability to be independent, reflective and critical thinkers, rather than mere followers and continuers of a tradition.

The process of moving from initiate to independent agent might take some considerable

amount of time, but the transition from one status to the other should be seen as an essential goal of the teacher/learner relationship. Even if not everyone will be capable of becoming fully independent actors, the proposition that the possibility exists should be at the heart of the relationship in order to avoid falling into a pattern wherein both teacher and learner reinforce an overly dependent relationship. This position not only provides for the eventuality of the learner becoming a teacher, but also presupposes that the teacher is also a learner in all stages of the relationship. The nature of the reciprocity might be only symbolic in the beginning of a teacher/learner relationship, but augmenting the possibility and a commitment to bringing mutuality to the balance of roles is essential to this approach.

How can we actually do this sort of educational work? Practically speaking, it's not enough to explain the idea. We to model the idea by running a program for the CEs that includes:

- 1) an example of good work, without making excuses about time or preparation;
- 2) scheduled and structured opportunities for the CEs to reflect on and discuss with us the activities we lead;
- 3) formal evaluation of the demo program, preferably according to a rubric we develop in advance and then fine-tune with them, so that they will have some experience developing rubrics for evaluating their own success;
- 4) a supportive planning process for them to work on their activities within a framework that balances autonomy and guidance;
- 5) the mechanism for continuing to evaluate their work throughout the summer.

Appendix F: Peer Observation and Reflective Feedback

Reflective feedback is a dialogue for the benefit of both the person who is receiving the feedback and the peer. It is designed so that they can both gain a deeper understanding of their experience.

What are the elements of 'good' feedback in this context? The goal is developing a deep and complex mutual understanding, rather than offering either a good review or a critique (in the sense of finding fault). A feedback session can be considered successful when both participants feel that they are collaborating around an element of practice and contributing to a greater understanding of the experience, helping them achieve their goals.

Role of the Observer:

Each educator will have a opportunity to observe a colleague facilitate a session. The role of the person observing is to sit in on the session and take notes on what is being observed.

The notes will serve as the data around which the feedback conversation will take place. It is important to be as descriptive as possible, noting what is being said and done throughout the session. Note elements that interest, puzzle, or surprise you. Focus on observations rather than opinions.

Role of the Presenter:

The feedback session is meant to enrich the experience of both the observer and presenter.

The presenter should be able to learn something new, gain a understanding about the practice of being an educator. The more the presenter can guide the discussion, the more this will happen. For example, identify something you are interested in talking about with

the person observing you, before the session. The observer can focus his/her observations and especially comments on that aspect.

Feedback Session:

1. (2 min) **Introduction** (*Before the session, if at all possible*)

The presenting educator talks first, offering a brief synopsis of the plan and the context in order to fully understand what was going on in that part of the session. The presenting educator will also answer the question what he/she is most interested in talking about in this feedback session. If the two people are looking at a video clip together, the presenter should also explain why that clip was chosen. The presenter will decide on aspects of the program about which he or she would like feedback.

2. (5 min) **Clarification**

This is a chance for the observing educator to ask for clarification about unclear issues or aspects of the plan. The presenter will answer the questions.

3. (5 min) **Descriptive Sharing**

In this part, the observer begins by saying things that he/she noticed in the session that was observed. 'Noticing' means what was observed, rather than a value judgment. Use descriptive language, rather than sharing opinions or judgment at this point in the protocol. The purpose of this stage is to highlight the "data" or the "text" of the conversation.

4. (10 min) **Feedback and Discussion**

This part attempts to make sense of what went on in the observed session. The observing educator should begin by noting aspects of the activity that you felt were significant and that you personally appreciated. Also note aspects of the activity that may have been difficult to understand or did not seem to serve the purpose of the activity. All this discussion should be in the vein of trying to make sense of the “text” of the activity, the notes taken by the observer or what is seen on the video clip. Comments should be formulated as, “I appreciated learning about...,” as opposed to, “You did a really good job with...,” or “I didn’t understand...,” rather than, “You confused me regarding...” Then the presenting educator can join the conversation, not to express an opinion about what the observer is noting, but rather to add the dimension of the presenter’s interpretation of the activity.

5. (5 min) **Reactions**

The presenter now gets time to say initial reactions to what was said if he/she so desires. S/he can ask clarifying questions, talk about the flow of the activity, or mention what was learned about it while *facilitating*.

6. (3 min) **Debriefing**

Both peers answer the following questions: How did it work to use this protocol and to receive feedback? Was it helpful? What did we get out of it?

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