

Worker Generated Issues, Critical Dialogue, and Praxis:  
A Freirean approach to developing social change projects

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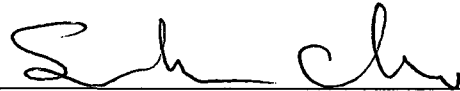
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

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A Freirean approach to developing social change projects

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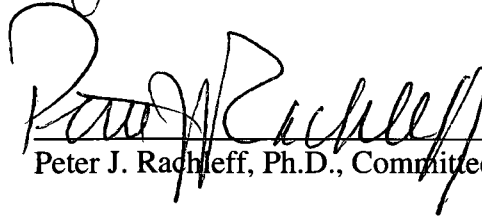
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November 8, 2009

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the life and work of Paulo Freire (1921-1997), whose tireless advocacy and love for those oppressed throughout the world has given so many of us the hope to begin engaging in change. I am grateful beyond the telling. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to Riaz Malik (1956-1993) whose brilliant struggle against the Western narration of prehistory was cut short by a U.S. healthcare system that had already failed for those marked with accents and color.

It has been an honor to work with my dissertation committee, thanks to Peter Rachleff and Zeus Leonardo for weaving the issues of labor and race together with such penetration, passion and creativity. A very special thanks to Seehwa Cho, the chair of my committee, for her patience, careful critique, and encouragement. Her masterful editing which came to be known as “the knife” always moved me toward clarity. Without her gentle hands pushing me through the years, I am certain this project would never have found its conclusion.

I am grateful to my family, Christine, Connor and Mo, for letting me be the stranger in the attic at times when the reading and writing overwhelmed me and for listening to my ideas when they were just beginning to grow. Thanks to my parents, Sally and Dan for their continuous support, and my sister Bridget for knowing just when I needed help the most.

This project would not have been possible without the friendship and support of many members of UAW Local 879, including Dennis Leigh, Patrick Wiles, Jim Hooper, Tonya Wade, Brian Huseby, Darius Shannon, Cecilia Mendoza, Marcia Shearen-Anderson, Marlowe Stoxstell, Brenda Sparkman, Chinasa Eke, and Denny Dickhousen. I would also like to thank Margie Rios, Benjamin Gross, Joel Gobatze, and Mike Reintze.

There are many others who helped along the way, to name a few: Dee, Brian McMahon, Howard Kling, Rob McKenzie, Roger Tervene, Barbara Daughter, Tom Laney, George Moye, Lynn Hinkle, Vern Gagner, Jan Carr, Bob Killeen Jr., John Holst, Stephen Brookfield, and Eleni Roulis.

A special thanks to Larry Olds who keeps the Popular Education News alive.

## Abstract

The escalating crisis in capitalist relations around the world demands a variety of responses that unmask the confusing structures that perpetuate asymmetrical power relations, while reframing what is truly in the interests of the majority of people. Industrial unions in the U.S. have at times aspired to such an advocacy role, but currently offer little resistance to the loss of living wage jobs. At the grass roots level, there have been promising projects of resistance to globalization growing out of the fields of Popular Education, Participant Research and Critical Pedagogy. Taking a community centered approach these projects attempt to amplify the voices of those most affected by the failing economy, by implementing strategies based on egalitarian and democratic principles stimulating an organically developed critical theory. This dissertation study is an exploration into developing social change projects based on the work of Paulo Freire and informed by other voices within the field of Critical Pedagogy and related traditions. Working with 16 volunteer autoworkers from an assembly plant located in the Midwest of the U.S., this research examines their issues, themes and group process leading to visions of small scale social change. Two themes, *The loss of the middle class*, and *Raising Children: from a community perspective*, emerged from one-on-one interviews, and became the generative beginnings for the group work. The group production was considered a success by the participants, developed out of consensus and culminating in envisioned projects potent with possibility for actual implementation. However, analysis of the process and content of the group work revealed several important weaknesses with the way in which the group work was facilitated, particularly in the lack of well developed dialectic reasoning and problem posing in dialogue. The results suggest a lack of politicization engendering a weak form of praxis, allowing the participants to move

from their own concrete realities to an abstract position of helping “Others”. Several ideas for inserting political elements are suggested in the conclusion of this dissertation.

... each day be open to the world, be ready to think; each day be ready not to accept what is said just because it is said, be predisposed to reread what is read; each day investigate, question and doubt. I think it is most necessary to doubt. I feel it is always necessary not to be sure, that is to be overly sure of “certainties”

Paulo Freire reflecting upon 16 years in exile,  
*The Politics of Education: Culture power and liberation (1985, p. 181)*

**Voices**

Billions in silenced margins  
De-materialized in the mainstream  
Dangerous portrayals of “others”

Do you dare to hear them?

Keening for a rebirth of human relations  
Passionately listening through the heat of dialogue  
The contentious sweat of shared ideas, within many demands

As the crisis deepens  
Desperation will amplify this cacophony

Do you care to listen?

Give the gift of your consciousness...  
Your conscience...  
Your love...

Listen deeply for a new beginning

*TOB 2009*



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## CHAPTER ONE

### Statement of the Purpose

In the broadest possible terms, this dissertation in the field of critical pedagogy brings together a small scale community centered approach for developing social movement with a group of people who, as autoworkers, share in their working class labor. The synergy of combining this participant centered, potentially transformative process with this particular group of participants may stimulate an understanding of the linkages between the interests of labor, and broader societal issues which could inform future labor/community collaborations for movement.

The project design evolved out of an understanding of popular education principles adapted from the work of Paulo Freire, and informed by other voices within the field of Critical Pedagogy, and related traditions. Freire, the Brazilian born educator and philosopher, emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a global champion for applying critical theory to educational practices. Freire's construction of this critical pedagogy grew out of his experiences with the oppressive poverty of post-colonial capitalist relations, and the tyranny with which these conditions were promulgated. These experiences were integrated into his early literacy work, and fostered a philosophical understanding that the oppressed must actively engage in, and ultimately lead in their own transformation. As a result, Freire's pedagogical projects were grounded in, and evolved out of, the lived experiences of the participants. From this foundation, facilitators and participants engaged in dialogue for the purpose of developing praxis, a unified process of action and critical reflection. Freire's projects were centered on developing basic literacy as a way for people to read, and name their own world. In keeping with Freire's principles, this study is an exploration of possibility



that shifts the emphasis of this critical pedagogy to a form of literacy development that directly addresses the construction of participant directed social change.

Beginning with a series of interviews with the volunteer participants, the first focus of this study is on the themes that develop out of their lived experiences. Working from the basis of themes held in common, these autoworkers were assigned to groups for the purpose of developing a shared vision of a project to address some aspect of these themes. How the various visions of these projects develop, is the second focus of this study. The third focus centers on the practice of an action/reflection form of dialogue implemented in this study.

This study does not address labor issues or movement directly, as the content and direction of these potential participant generated social change projects were variable and undetermined at the outset. As it turned out, while the participants shared working and wage conditions, and the impending end of their employment within the automotive industry, the common issues that surfaced and become the generative beginnings of these potential social change projects were not directly related to work. Seeking the widest range of participant centered issues, and then selecting those that were shared in common by other volunteers, was not an attempt to disconnect from traditional workplace and labor issues. The intention was rather to center participant issues within the context of the broader sets of communities, in which they lived their lives, enhancing the possibility for creative linkages across the breadth of the social landscape, while striving to articulate common ground among people who shared aspects of a similar economic position within the US.

## Project Context

### *Midwestern Autoworkers Are Not Easily Labeled*

The choice to work with current and recently separated members of an industrial union was an interesting mix of serendipity and a growing interest in exploring the potential for agency among participants in working conditions that are considered by many to be oppressively subordinate to the machinations of management, while providing the living wages of the primary labor force. Working with a United Auto Workers (UAW) local in an on-site adult education program at a UAW-Ford Assembly Plant, part of a package of educational benefits negotiated in the 1980's, provided the opportunity to develop working and personal relationships with people throughout all areas of production, and union leadership. In the past eight years, as a teacher, advocate and observer of the roughly 1800 UAW members at this plant, I have come to appreciate the human complexity behind the name *autoworker* and by extension, the elaborate webs of interrelations that construct what might be called "plant culture". The churning mix of workday production -- an uneven jumble of company, union, and personal demands -- collide amidst the bone grinding, relentless and often mind-numbing assembly line work. While sharing an ability to withstand this subordinate labor as hourly workers, 10 hours a day five plus days a week when in full production, there is a remarkable range of personalities represented in the plant population. These individual differences play out within disparate cultural contexts inside the plant and beyond.

The traditionally hierarchical relationship between salaried management personnel and hourly workers has been a part of plant culture since this Midwestern production facility was opened in 1925, and became institutionally adversarial in 1946 when the UAW successfully organized the plant (McMahon, 1998). The union's roles on

the shop floor, such as enforcing contract work rules and health & safety issues, negotiating grievances, and assuring product quality are well established, and mark the boundaries where most daily adversities are contested.

Within the hourly worker side of this equation, there are less visible but important hierarchies as well. Though they share membership within the union, there are substantial differences in working conditions based on seniority, union activism, political acumen, and lines demarcating jobs only for skilled trades. These hierarchies do, at times, create stress among workers adding to the mix of social and cultural tensions that can divide the membership.

#### *Dispersed Home Communities*

Heterogeneity in the workforce is not well reflected in the predominantly male and racially white majorities (each roughly 82% of plant population respectively, see table 1). Difference is better represented in the disparate mix of urban (15%), suburban (52%), and rural communities (33%) that these autoworkers call home. Sorted by zip code, only 15% of the UAW members live within a 10 mile radius of the plant, a full 15% are permanent residents of the neighboring state of Wisconsin, and some workers claim commutes as long as 2 hours one way (Sellers & O'Brien, 2005).

There are also quite a few people who have followed work to this plant from other company facilities in places like Alabama, Georgia, Michigan, Ohio, and New Jersey, resettling in the Twin Cities. For some this is a short-term situation, while for others the move has been closer to permanent.

Table 1

*2005 Racial Breakdown at Twin Cities Assembly Plant N=2002\*\**

Racial group *	% of total by race	Males	% of all males	% plant total	Females	% all females	% of plant total
White	82.41%	1392	84.31%	69.53%	258	73.50%	12.89%
Black	12.14%	179	10.84%	8.94%	64	18.23%	3.20%
Hispanic	3.35%	47	2.85%	2.35%	20	5.70%	1.00%
Asian American	1.45%	22	1.33%	1.10%	7	1.99%	0.35%
Native American	0.65%	11	0.67%	0.55%	2	0.57%	0.10%
Column Totals	100.00%	1651	100.00%	82.47%	351	99.99%	17.54%

\*Data supplied by Human Resources October, 2006. Demarcations were determined by the company.

\*\* Number includes roughly 150 salaried personnel.

### *Challenges to Collective Agency*

There are no statistics kept on other important social and economic demarcations such as religious affiliation, political ideology and level of union participation, or class identity. These significant differences have a profound effect on interpersonal relations in the plant. The broad array of attitudes, beliefs, and lifestyles among autoworkers are not easily characterized, and people are often at odds with one another about their perceptions surrounding problematic issues that have a great impact on their lives. These perceptions include different visions of what it means to be part of a union; what it means to be working class or middle class; the role the government should take in protecting living wage jobs, the environment, or insuring healthcare. These perceptual differences include the level of awareness that problems exist, viewpoints as to who or what is

responsible for the problems, and on tactics and strategies to overcome problems.

As an example, autoworkers vary widely in their consumption habits, and in their visions of what political agendas serve their interests. Conversations splinter apart as factions praising the benefits of free trade, fair trade, and expressions of economic isolationism collide with one another. Coworkers call for tax cuts and increased governmental services, condemnation of corporate welfare amidst hopes for a governmental “bailout” should the auto industry fail to turn around the current decline. Cutting across all of these disparate economic points of view are the proud claims of purchasing products on the cheap at multinational big box stores. Across the plant, anti union retailer Sam’s Club membership cards and local union identification cards can be found in the same wallets as consumer logic often trumps any semblance of labor philosophy. Gaining substantial earning power through global competition, workers often subscribe to the very same business practices that are now being turned against them.

On some levels, this incongruity may seem surprising but it is less dissonant if the plant population is viewed as a microcosm of the broader society, rather than a discrete subset. The ideological divisions that have rent the nation in recent elections are quite palpable within the geographical reach of these commuting workers. The steady march of capital’s interests across the country reflects upon this local landscape as well.

### *The Current Crisis*

The U.S. automotive industry is experiencing a crisis of overproduction, and declining market share. They are seeking to compensate through global production, taking advantage of competing international labor markets; leveraging profits through ever more marginalized worker compensation, less cumbersome environmental restrictions and tax burdens (Rasmus, 2006). Plant closings, and the subsequent loss of

hundreds of thousands of living wage jobs across the US automobile industry, have been accompanied by an eerie taciturn resignation on the part of this nation's leadership, the international union, and the public in general. In the nation's capital these market adjustments are watched with an eye toward political fallout, while the financial markets look for ways to profit from restructuring. At the national level of the union, the International UAW have long positioned themselves as a part of the automotive business, making the thought of resistant direct action seem suicidal. The International's response to this crisis has been to focus on short term monetary gains for active members, particularly those with high seniority, in exchange for the diminished working conditions of future union members. Among the broader public, the acceptance of the demise of yet more living wage jobs seems to have elicited a cool indifference. Whether this apathy is driven by a sense of crushing powerlessness or the cynicism hardened from too many promises broken; by the inattention of consuming self-interest or the faithful belief in a broken system, the urgent need for action is growing as inequality and poverty continue to escalate with each plant door that is shuttered.

Union membership and participation have fallen precipitously in recent years. Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that union participation dipped below 13% of the national workforce in 2003, a drop of more than one-third since the early 1980's (U. S. Department of Labor, 2004). In 2005, the United Auto Worker rolls were reduced to 599 thousand, to just over 37% of the 1.6 million in 1970 (Krisher, 2006). ). The list of plant closings is staggering, with Ford, planning to close 14 additional plants by 2008, including the plant where this study is taking place, (Star Tribune, 2006).

The current strategy of "buyout" packages has decimated the rolls of the UAW in this Midwestern plant. Of the nearly 1800 UAW workers at the plant, 1600 signed up for

one of several packages, most anticipating the plant closing in the coming year. For about one-third of those accepting, with nearly 30 years of service with the company, these packages have provided an abrupt transition to what has been a decent retirement package; though these so called “legacy” costs (benefits that continue after the worker has retired) were under great pressure when negotiations began on the new contract in the fall of 2007. For many of the other two-thirds of autoworkers, accepting a buyout represented the end of a career relationship with the UAW, and the automotive industry. For those entering the job market looking for income and benefit replacement, the search will be a difficult one. Most are seeking primary labor jobs with few licenses and certifications beyond a high school diploma (see Table 2).

In order to run the plant since going to one shift, there has been a great need for experienced autoworkers. About 600 union employees, who signed up for a buyout, have accepted Temporary Part Time (TPT) positions. This revolving door process has people walking out the plant on their last day as fully vested union members with seniority, making well over \$26.00 per hour, and returning to the same job the following Monday as an *at will* employee with a fresh seniority date, little union protection, and a nearly 30% cut in pay.

To some observers, this buyout process has been a thinly veiled endeavor to re-negotiate the terms of labor agreements while still under a union contract, creating a new employment arrangement with which to leverage concessions from labor in future bargaining. Some also see buyouts as part of a broader initiative by the auto industry to position their North American operations for bankruptcy protection, in an effort to off load legacy costs onto Federal taxpayers.

Table 2

*Self Reported Education Level UAW - Ford employment application data October 1999*

Grade Level Completed	UAW Members	% of UAW Population
Grade 8 or less	3	.1 %
1 year of High School	15	1 %
2-3 years of high School	51	3.3 %
4 years of High School	1304	85 %
1 Year of College	72	4.6 %
2-3 years of college	69	4.4 %
4 years of college	10	.6 %
Bachelors degree and beyond	14	1 %
Total	1538 *	99.9%

\* There were 1850 UAW – Ford Employees on the rolls in October 1999 with %17 unaccounted for in this data. Applications from employees transferring from other plants were not available and account for the majority of the 17% difference.

Current business strategies appear to be moving production off shore, pursuing favorable “Free” trade agreements, allowing full exploitation of lucrative arrangements in less developed capitalist economies. As an example, the small trucks made in this Midwestern plant are also being made in Thailand, and conversion to U.S. efficiency and emissions standards can occur immediately once trade barriers have been lifted.

These economic manifestations of maturing capital relations are perhaps the most visible aspects of the crisis in the U.S. However, there are equally disturbing shifts in the political and social spheres of our society. Linking issues that may seem isolated within



one of these spheres to the broader social, political, and economic shifts is an essential feature of popular education projects.

*Popular Education, Participant Research, and Critical Social Theory*

Paulo Freire's writings, fieldwork, and advocacy have impacted several fields of study within education, the social sciences, international relations, and even theology. As a result, Freire's work surfaces in many different areas. Philosophically, Freire's early theoretical work added to the growing body of critical theory that claims ties to Marx, Kant, and the Frankfurt School among others. Zeus Leonardo (2004) positions Freire squarely within the frame of critical social theory that blossomed with publication of Freire's major work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002):

Without suggesting that Freire accomplished his goals before he died in 1997, his work became the fulcrum for a [critical social theory] program in education that searched for a proper reconciliation between structural conditions and human agency. Freire gave education a language that neglected neither the effect of oppression on concrete people nor their ability to intervene of their own behalf, nor the terrorizing and structured consequences of capitalism and other systems- (Leonardo, 2004).

Critical social theory and what has come to be known as critical pedagogy, combine critiques of power with a perspective that strives to put the experience and voice of the oppressed at the forefront. These critical elements also inform the two interrelated applied fields of participant research, and popular education. Rajesh Tandon (1988) asserts that the methodologies of participant research center the locus of knowledge production within people who are experiencing oppression, and away from the academy and the researcher. Ideally, participant research supports the people in doing their own research for their own purposes, from creating the outline for the inquiry, in the collection of data and analysis, and including the use of the outcomes of the research. These critical elements are also found in the projects of popular education.

Carlos Torres (1995) uses the terms with more precision, referring to popular education as a non-formal education movement and participant action research as the small-scale political and emancipatory projects within the movement. Generally, the term popular education is used to refer to any project utilizing a set of principles put forth by Freire and other contemporary critical theorists, while participant research is used to describe mainly problem solving projects that apply these principles from beginning to end. For the purposes of this dissertation project I am exploring social change in the broader context of popular education.

### *Possibilities for Popular Education*

Perhaps the Portuguese term *educação popular* would be better translated in contemporary English as “education among the people” rather than the more literal *popular education*. The word popular in this case, refers to location, and in combination with the word education, describes a community-generated form of knowledge production. Popular education practices are embedded in the community with the content initially generated from within that community purposefully directed toward transformative outcomes. John Hurst, a Professor at the Berkeley School of Education, describes the essence of this form of pedagogy. “Popular education is, at root, the empowerment of adults through democratically structured cooperative study and action, directed toward achieving more just and peaceful societies within a life sustaining global environment” (Hurst, 1995, p. 9).

Work employing these principles has had a global reach, initiating community based development and literacy projects across many parts of the world. These endeavors take the form of fundamental literacy campaigns such as those in which Paulo Freire was involved as well as economic development projects (Hope & Timmel, 2003). In the U.S.

Popular Education projects that developed out of organizations such as Highlander in Tennessee, Project South in Georgia, and SCOPE in California, have been important in organizing, leadership development, and capacity building within the frameworks of labor struggles, and broader social movements such as civil rights. Popular education offers a constructive process to bring disparate voices together, to be heard. Popular education approaches, naturally begin as projects of resistance, demystifying power relations, finding common ground, and contesting certain aspects of the status quo in search of more equitable social and economic movement.

### *Globalization and Popular Education*

The currents sweeping manufacturing today are expressions of the effects of globalization on the U.S. economy. As the flagship of consumerism and worldwide exploitation, these effects are uneven and polarizing, and commonly held to be as inevitable as the seasons. Like a speculative weather report, we watch as Wall Street interprets, and prepares us for the daily economic sunshine and rain. As the chasm between rich and poor in this country deepens, spectators watch the mediated horrors of the economic storms, glad to be safe, believing the myth that those caught up in the disaster were somehow complicit, ignoring the signs, not nimble enough to find cover. The victims of plant closings, and “market readjusting” industry shifts, scrape together what they can find for work, often losing middle class economic stability; some losing everything.

As these expressions of capitalist relations pound away economically, our apparent inability to resist belies how deeply they have also permeated our social and political spheres. Democracy has been warped in dramatic ways with access to free speech mediated and meted out by the spending power of dollars. Our representative

government provides skewed representation for the interests of the wealthy as Congress, state houses, and city halls are increasingly filled with those who have owning class interests.

A critical element in developing resistance to globalization is the ability to account for what is happening, to be a witness with an ability to explain. The following three critiques apply very different lenses to these accelerating capitalist relations, seeking different ways to demystify the apparent complexity. They also point to formations of resistance that center on the development of popular egalitarian democratic projects with similar theoretical underpinnings as this project proposes.

Douglas Kellner suggests taking a dialectical approach to understanding transnational capitalist relations in his book chapter *Globalization and New Social Movements: Lessons for Critical Theory and Pedagogy* (Kellner, 2000, chap. 13). He describes globalization “multivalently” with different layers or orbits of effect. It is a “highly complex and multidimensional process in the economy, polity, culture and everyday life” (p. 303). As viewed from the top the vast network of transnational relations is overwhelming. From this perspective, economics has clearly usurped the power of politics and culture “in which [these] once relatively autonomous spheres are controlled by economic elites and forces” (p. 307). The cynicism, hopelessness and the contradictory logic wrought from this view from the top has gripped many whose economic interests have fallen off the accelerating engine of wealth accumulation.

The view from which globalization is most understandable is from the bottom, generated out of the lived experiences of those with first hand knowledge of its negative effects. Incremental reforms of the view from the top have little effect on the overall trajectory of globalization. Kellner (2000) holds the position, that resistance is possible

and is happening within the cracks and fissures that penetrate globalization's systems. They originate within the view from the bottom, in the form of radical democratic projects. He highlights the dialogic work of Paulo Freire and others in the field of Critical Pedagogy as the kind of organic processes needed for these projects of resistance to develop. Through horizontal egalitarian relationships built in dialogue, new relations can develop. He suggests that these new relationships make possible new visions for change, utilizing technologies that have been seized as tools of oppression. The World Wide Web offers just such a possibility. With instant global reach, groups like the Zapatistas have brought international pressure to bear on the Mexican government and have spread word of their project and created linkages with groups in places like Northern Ireland (Morello 2007). Other visions of globalization, however, point to the difficulties of radicalizing groups such as the subordinate primary labor market workers that participated in this dissertation project.

James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, in their book *Globalization Unmasked* (2001), view current capitalist relations as a complex extension of imperialism, where nation states are not disappearing, but rather shifting toward further advancing the global interests of the elite. These interests, which are driving globalization, come into focus more clearly when one can identify how they participate within these relations. The participants in these capitalist relations fall into one of three groups, which interestingly, cut across all classes in society. These are globalization's *advocates*, *adversaries* and *ambivalents*. The *advocates* include the "ascending states and their dominant economic enterprises" with a supporting cast of their "political and economic counterparts in the dominated countries". Also in this group are "high level state functionaries..., academics and publicists" who "manufacture the theories and concepts that can be used to justify

and prescribe globalist programs, strategies and tactics” (p. 31-38), as well as the capitalist (financial) class in general. The *adversaries* of these capitalist relations around the globe are rural small farmers and peasants, workers throughout many sectors of national economies, the majority of public employees feeling the pressure of privatization and budget cuts, as well as many small businesses. The third group who Petras and Veltmeyer name the *ambivalents*, directly relate to the participants in this study. They are employed in industries that are unable to adjust to global competition, but whose owners have gained from corporate welfare, the erosion of tax collection, and the subsequent reductions in services. They are workers such as those in the auto industry who earn livable wages and find themselves in the middle of this struggle- trying to hold on to what they have.

Petras and Veltmeyer see the ambivalents as a group that is open to contestation:

What are decisive in the swing of these sectors are political intervention, organization, and struggle. When the globalist classes are in command, the ambivalent classes adapt to rather than resist globalist encroachments. When the subordinate classes are in ascendancy, the ‘ambivalents’ join the civic strikes, increase demands for state protection and favor state regulation of sweatshops and assembly plants (p. 33).

The implication here is that in the U.S., where globalist classes are at their most bold it may take broad based social movements to shift these autoworkers from resigned adaptation to resistance.

While Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) have a new socialist agenda, they feel that whatever process might emerge to counter imperialism, it must be democratic, inclusive, and organic in nature; dynamically reigning in individual accumulation and political corruption for the goals of equity and sustainability. While they only briefly mention business expropriation in theory, as a natural reaction to international corporate

divestiture, there are current examples that exemplify the kind of transitional anti-imperialist projects they envision. The expropriation movement in Argentina exploded with the country's economic collapse in 2001, when billions of dollars worth of currency was airlifted out of the country in one night leaving banks insolvent, and the vast majority of the population without access to their savings. Many business owners simply locked their doors and walked away, owing workers back pay. In the case of Zanon Ceramic (now known as Fabrica Sin Patron- Factory Without Owner) there were also large public subsidies that were not honored (and somehow disappeared) with the closing.

Many of the workers at the plant decided to form an egalitarian, democratic organization to expropriate and run the business. Every major decision made in the plant since its expropriation has been by majority worker vote made in monthly, day long meetings. Day-to-day decisions have been made in representational coordinator meetings, with all results publicized. Working in collaboration with community and labor organizations, the factory workers have gained huge support regionally, thrived economically, and have donated much needed materials to hospitals and schools. Because of widespread community support, Zanon has survived many eviction attempts, with thousands of neighbors and other supporters mobilizing on short notice to provide massive resistance (Zibechi 2006). Zanon is a story of struggle against neoliberal projects in Argentina, which exemplifies many of the principles of popular education suggested in the theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation.

Another view of globalization challenges the very basis of what is commonly held as democratic. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri formulate a construction of globalization that is both dire, and hopeful. In their book *Empire* (2000), they outline a highly complex movement from imperialism to empire- a move from disciplinary power,

to a power that attempts to control the hearts and minds of the World. Moving from an economy based on material production to one based on information production. Empire is not a paradigm that is easily described. Rather than previous empires such as Rome, Hardt and Negri's vision is of nations connected like the gears of an enormous clock, moving in different speeds and ratios, but with a common purpose driven by maturing capitalist relations. U.S. dominance in this scheme is only relevant in empire's current form, though this could change without altering its trajectory. This description of empire only touches the surface of Hardt and Negri's vision though it is where it leads that is of most interest to this project. The biopolitical world is the space "where social, economic, and political production, and reproduction coincide" (p. 388). What drives production in the biopolitical is desire. "Desire appears here as productive space, as the actuality of human cooperation in the construction of history ... the biopolitical world is an inexhaustible weaving together of generative actions, of which the collective (as meeting point of singularities) is the motor" (p. 387-388). This is the power of what Hardt and Negri call multitude, a complex constellation of singularities that work in common. In their book entitled *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004) the authors further describe this concept of singularity that acts in common:

The question to ask is not 'What is the multitude?' but rather 'what can the multitude become?' Such a political project must clearly be grounded in an empirical analysis that demonstrates the common conditions of those who can become multitude. Common conditions, of course, does not mean sameness or unity, but it does require that no differences of nature or kind divide the multitude. It means, in other words, that the innumerable specific types of labor, forms of life, and geographical location, which will always necessarily remain, do not prohibit communication and collaboration in a common political project (p. 105-106).

It is a challenge to those seeking to construct visions beyond a globalized world to scrap the old paradigms that construct unity as oneness, the concept that Hardt and



Negri reject (2004, p. 312). The concept of one leader, a sovereign, runs counter to their vision of multitude. They also abandon the notions we hold of masses speaking with one voice. If a group is formed that is indifferent to the uniqueness of singularities, and has no clear shared vision, then it is simply a form of mob, which generates a kind of passivity that can only follow (2004, p. 100).

Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that the projects of multitude must have a global horizon. They must recognize the “domination, violence, mystification, alienation, and expropriation” which are escalating crisis around the world. These conditions, expressed in the “urgent grievances and demands of so many” (p. 309-312), point out the potential power of multitude, which has vast collective energies. Harnessing global commonalities in resistance is the way to overwhelm the coordinated efforts of the elite transnational relations of empire.

These three visions of globalization and resistance are quite different from one another, though there are common threads. An important way to understand resistance to globalization is through the myriad of unique local efforts which recognize the essential nature of egalitarian democratic principles, and which strive to connect to broader struggles through an organic critical theory.

There are quite serious challenges to theoretical frameworks that favor grass roots organizing, and ignore the potential of a movement where many factions band together in some form. John Sanbonmatsu, in his book *The Post Modern Prince* (2004) suggests that in order to become effective, the oppressed and those who support their causes must develop a common strategy, and push for the democratic coalescence of various movements into a “unity in diversity” under a single political party (p. 187 – 188). This project does not attempt to resolve the legitimate tensions between independent bottom

up organizing, and more universalizing visions of formation and movement. Regardless of the perspective, it is hard to discount the reality of local resistance atomized across the globe.

## Research Design

### *Qualitative Traditions*

This study is at once an examination of a unique approach to popular education in the Midwestern United States, and an exploration of the possibilities for worker generated agency. It is a series of processes that attempt to witness and amplify authentic participant voice and meaning while paradoxically being facilitated, and manipulated by the researcher. The foundations of the field methodology rest on a highly principled dedication to the dignity of the participant's perspective and knowledge, but with the deliberate aim of problematizing and decentering these understandings through critical dialogue. As these tensions are set in motion during the study, it is hoped that the ensuing dialogue and opportunity for action-reflection provided the participants with valuable working knowledges about some of the challenges and possibilities for group agency, while also providing insight for those who subsequently hear and read about this project.

Developing a project out of a critical pedagogy does not necessarily fit easily into a single qualitative tradition. In this case, where the study has multiple dimensions— the organic development of process inherent in a Freirean approach to dialogics— in the performative fieldwork, the descriptive aspects, and the critical and analytical facets, there is a natural blending of perspectives that call for a unique set of research techniques. In seeking guidance for how to develop an ethical activist researcher role demanded by this project, I have relied heavily on what D. Soyini Madison (2005) calls Critical

Ethnography. Re-presenting the process of critical facilitation, the dynamics of dialogue, and the action-reflection of praxis, calls for the role of researcher to surface, for positionality to be openly declared and woven into both the fieldwork and analysis. Dealing with the more functional aspects of data collection, investigative thematic development, analysis, and the overall structure of reporting I follow many of the methods gleaned from Grounded Theory.

### *Sampling and Recruitment*

The participants in the study are 16 assembly workers, who volunteered for this project. From those that volunteered, an attempt was made to represent as wide a variety of demographics as possible, with an emphasis toward balancing for gender and race. This layered typical case sampling is not random, and the interjection of the volunteer aspect adds to the subjectivity of the sampling technique. The researcher's personal connection to several of the participants also entered into the selection process as well as what might be called "chain sampling", sampling based on informant recommendations (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2003, p.178-9). Having known several of the participants for many years, several issues did arise. I had the option to fit people together who I thought would work well as a collection of personalities. I purposely attempted to let the strength of common themes build the groups, and as it turned out this made for surprisingly different and stronger groupings than what I might have constructed. Another issue that surfaced as a result of long-term relationships was trust. There was not only an openness in the beginning of the initial interviews that might not have been so easily accessed, but also a commitment to the project, and "Tim's paper" that seemed to help build a solidarity within the group work.

Critique of Critical Pedagogy's silence in terms of race and gender in favor of class-centered analysis exposes several tensions that may have impacted this work. Freire's writing (1973, 1975, 2002) remains quite passive in differentiating between various forms of oppression. Indeed, the participant centered dialogue laid out in this study requires participant engagement in subjectivities such as race and gender, age, and class perception. Probing into these areas as a facilitator may, or may not have produced meaningful dialogue. My vision of a Freirean approach seeks participants who will carry issues such as race and gender forward with the facilitator in an advocacy role. While not having a lot of room to purposely choose people from a variety of backgrounds, the groups' work was stronger with heterogeneity of standpoints. One tension within this approach is the silenced voice, which may be a conscious or unconscious withdrawal on the part of the participant. The dynamics of this tension are further discussed in the section on interpretive validity late in this chapter. Institutional discrimination affects a host of influences such as hiring practices, what it takes to survive as a worker on the shop floor and how that has mediated, further subjugated, or drummed out voices of "Others". The whole basket of cultural inscription affects participants as well. With these tensions in mind, within the selection criteria, there was an emphasis toward a subtle over-representation of participants outside of the white male dominated demographic.

The following advertisement was published in three editions of the monthly local union newspaper *The Autoworker* (2006):

#### Interested In Social Change?

Would you volunteer to work with a small group of people to develop a Project for tackling change on an issue that you are interested in? Tim O'Brien (the same Tim who works in the Skills Enhancement Center) is looking for 20 active UAW assemblers who are willing to volunteer for a dissertation research project. The volunteers will have to commit to 12-15 hours (combined) of individual and group work.

The project begins with 2 individual interview sessions discussing issues that are important to the volunteer, followed by 3 small group sessions with people who have similar issues. This project represents the research for a dissertation which will, if accepted, be published. If you are interested, please contact... [contact information omitted] .

Approximately 40 people responded to the advertisement, and 16 ultimately agreed to participate. The volunteers had an opportunity to inquire about the project when they contacted the researcher, and were encouraged to ask more questions as they might come up. Respondents received a packet of information (see Appendix A) that included a brief description of the project including an explanation of the plan to protect participant privacy. The packet included a form requiring a signature, requesting permission to use quotes, descriptions of activities in both interviews and group work, and reproductions of artwork in the publication of the dissertation, and any subsequent work.

#### *Pre-interview Questionnaire*

A questionnaire was given to each of the 16 participants with the intention of using the responses as a starting point for the subsequent interviews. This paper and pencil instrument was designed to gain descriptive information about the participants (see Appendix B). In keeping with the spirit of the project, the questions solicited open-ended answers that promoted participant voicing over multiple choice labeling. Using self-descriptive reporting in this way offered participants the possibility to express unique perspectives, and to open up a more meaningfully informed basis in which to begin the interview process.

The questionnaire contains 24 questions describing self, family, educational experience, work experience, political perspectives, and neighborhood and community experiences such as church participation, community and union activism. The last

descriptive questions inquire about perceived issues facing local, national and global communities. The questionnaire also includes space in which the respondent can ask questions about the study, give any perceived issues they may have about group work, and a chance to name the alias to be used to represent them in the study.

### *Interview Process*

The individual interviews were designed to represent the early stages of a pedagogical process aimed at generating themes and issues, which could then become propositions for further pedagogical inquiry, theory, and action. There are several reasons why this research project incorporated an individual interview process in the development of themes and issues. Under some circumstances, such as the emergence of an identifiable community need, or in the case of a crisis, concerned participants within a community emerge to join together around an immediate issue. In this study, participants are joining together in the broader interest of social change. It was unclear what specific issues would emerge as potential topics for a group to undertake. Surfacing and exploring a significant breadth of an individual's perceived issues is an important aspect of this project. It was unclear whether this could be accomplished in the early stages of group work without a great deal of trust building and time. In this case, entering into the group work with an issue established seemed a more expedient approach.

Another element of the interview process was to facilitate code development. In Freire's large-scale literacy projects, code development was accomplished by interdisciplinary teams working with members of the community to surface contradictions that had immediate meaning for the potential participants. One of the unique aspects of this project is to examine the process of code development by the participants themselves. The intention is to accelerate a collective understanding of the

issue undertaken by the group, by introducing a set of participant developed codes that represent a diversity of perspectives and meanings about the topic.

There were two, 60-90 minute individual interviews conducted with each participant. The first explored the individual's personal perspectives using the questions and answers from the Pre-Interview Questionnaire as a starting point (see Appendix B). Questions covered a range of topics involving family, neighborhood, community, and work related issues. Time was set aside to clarify questions about the project, and to address participant concerns. After all the first interviews were conducted, an analysis of themes suggested two topics that were common among six or more participants. Individuals were assigned to one of these two groups built around a shared concern for a common issue.

The second interview focused on the selected issue, delving into participant knowledges of and experiences with the topic. Code development was also initiated, as ideas formed around contradictions and unanswered questions about the issue. Time was set aside for brainstorming ideas about how to capture these contradictions and questions in a representational form to be used as codes in the initial group sessions.

Ideas for sensory codes, and the codes themselves could be self-produced by hand, using basic art supplies or computer generation. Artifacts from the participant's home could also be used if appropriately descriptive of the theme in question and its contradictions. Ideas for sensory codes may also emanate from all forms of popular culture, including television, videos and DVD's, books, magazines, newspapers, music, web produced media, the Internet, and other sources. Codes could also be captured in performances such as a reading, a skit or pantomime. In a few cases, more time was needed beyond the 2nd interview to develop codes. Short meetings were subsequently

scheduled, and e-mail was used to send graphics between the participants and the researcher.

The interviewees were contacted individually and discretely, and the participant chose the location of the interviews. Two interviews took place in restaurants near participants' homes, three took place in homes, four different interviews took place in offices around the plant, and a pair of interviews was held on the shop floor in the midst of work. The majority of the interviews, and all of the group meetings were held in a training center conference room next to the assembly plant. Every attempt was made to keep the activity surrounding the interview minimal.

The interviews were audio recorded digitally, and the researcher transcribed most of each discussion verbatim. Field notes were kept during the interview and later inserted along side the transcription of the interview during the discovery process of open coding. These field notes were intentionally subjective keeping track of impressions, perceptions about environmental factors, and possible themes for exploration. Portions of the transcripts that needed clarification or confirmation were validated through a member check process. Throughout this project, it was important to maintain participant voice, and not overwrite their words with those that might seem more descriptive. A summary packet was developed after the first interview that included only their individual information, covering general demographics in the form that would most likely be used in the dissertation, as well as many possible quotes that related to the themes that had been identified from the first interview data.

The interview questions were grounded in an ontological paradigm, in other words, they seek an understanding of the speaker's meanings of words. They were open-ended and covered a broad range of topics. While the questions were not scripted, there



was a variety to the quality and depth within lines of inquiry. Madison (2005, p.27-30) offers several models for developing questions, which illustrate some of this variety. Madison's summary of Michael Patton's work breaks questions down into 6 main categories:

1. "*Behavior or experience questions*...address concrete human action, conduct or ways of 'doing'."
2. "*Opinion or value questions*... address a conviction, judgment, (or) belief... towards a phenomenon." Where opinion is idiosyncratic, and values are more culturally based.
3. "*Feeling questions* ...address emotions, sentiments and passions."
4. "*Knowledge questions* ..." include "... as well... where this knowledge comes from and how it is attained."
5. "*Sensory questions*...address... human sensation ... in...[physical] contact with the phenomenon."
6. "*Background and demographics* ... address concrete and practical information."

Jim Spradley developed a different set of questions, in his quest to produce logically discernable data. Madison (2005) organizes Spradley's work into three main lines of questioning with several possible variations within each.

1. "*Descriptive questions*..." get at a process of "...rendering a picture or image of a real or actual circumstance or object." (a) tour, (b)example, (c)experience, (d) native language.

2. “*Structural or explanation questions...* compliment and should be asked concurrently with descriptive questions. They ‘explore the organization of ...cultural knowledge’ ...”
3. “*Contrast questions...*” often require a great deal of clarification and elaboration on both sides of the dialogue. “Spradley outlines three principles that give rise to contrast questions” (a) “use principle” where symbolic meaning is derived from how it is used. (b) “similarity principle” (c) “contrast principle...” where “... meaning ...can be discovered by... how it is different from other symbols.”

I kept these two frameworks handy during the interviews, as I was interested in developing themes, issues, and their inherent contradictions, Spradley’s structural and contrast questions, along with Patton’s behavior and opinion questions were useful tools when more clarification was needed.

### *Group Work Process*

From the common themes and issues developed in the interview process, two affinity groups were constructed of 6 members each. Each group focused on a distinct issue that served as the beginning point for dialogue. The original proposal called for each group to meet for three sessions, each session lasting between 90 and 180 minutes, depending on the will of the group. As it turned out, each group opted for a 4<sup>th</sup> session, and all sessions were three hours in length. Lunch, fruit, snacks and beverages were provided to these volunteers at every meeting. The audio portions of the group sessions were recorded using a centrally located microphone connected to a digital recording device. Artifacts such as drawings, diagrams, lists, and agendas were photographed and collected when possible, by the researcher.

As an introduction to the group process in the first meeting, a brief discussion was held surrounding a Freirean approach, including ideas about dialogue and the concept of praxis. The preconditions for dialogue, which Freire suggests in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002) for dialogic action, (love, humility, faith, and hope) that serve as the basis for mutual trust were reviewed. The additional component of critical thinking which affords dialogue the action-reflection process of praxis was also discussed. Action-reflection and praxis are described in detail in the second chapter of this dissertation. After introductions were made, and the participants settled into some lunch, an agenda with time demarcations was developed with the group, which modeled a cycle of action-reflection. In the first action, the participant generated thematic codes were shared to help animate a collective understanding of the issues to be initially undertaken by the group (stimulating reflection). A short period of reflection followed, focusing on the value of developing and presenting codes.

An action plan was developed which could have included steps to obtain needed information, possible group or individual activities aimed at clarifying the tensions and contradictions inherent in the chosen themes, and to engage in the logistical issues affecting the next meeting. Both groups chose time to discuss the group theme directly at first. Time was set aside at several points in these initial meetings to reflect on what had just been discussed, and new action steps were agreed upon. At the end of each of the first sessions I facilitated dialogues on the collaborative model just experienced, with the suggestion that it was possible to modify the process at any time during the group sessions. These reflections were quite positive, and though there were unique developments in each group's process, the essential elements of this action reflection practice carried on through to the project completion.

After the first session, there was potential for an increasingly organic structure to emerge. I did however periodically insert the stated goal of attempting to determine the potential scope, direction, and design of a project. The general feeling on the part of both groups was to develop something that would be achievable, and able to be implemented.

Near the beginning of each of the second sessions, I introduced the concept of dialectic thinking; the idea that with every theme there is an opposite related theme. This antithesis helps to define the limits of the theme, and the work to be done. At the same time I introduced the idea of suspending ones disbelief and attempting to see the horizon of what could be. The thrust of this discussion was to change the focus of the group from the particulars of their own experience, toward a broader horizon of what should be done. Moving from this horizon of possibility back toward perceived reality informs the work that needs to take place in the project. Dialectic thinking and the concept of suspension (referred to as liminality and heterotopia) are also discussed in greater detail in the second chapter of this dissertation

There were two important structural issues that remained purposefully unresolved, but not without consideration. The first dealt with the forms of democracy that are constructed within the groups. If the processes mirror those that are in use formally in this country, there is a potential for the existing power relations to dominate. Luke and Gore (1992) suggest that from a historical perspective, democratic theory, which is based on a misogynistic system of representation (Greek), cannot become innocently egalitarian. “Liberal idealism” cannot be taken at face value, because it has been an overwhelmingly phalocentric project (p 34).

Bruce James Smith, in *Politics and Remembrance I*(Giroux 1997), describes two forms of democratic construction that are very different from one another. *Custom* runs

parallel to Luke and Gore's (1992) liberal idealism, as it describes the hegemonic force of the status quo. It is about homogenization of culture and is in direct opposition to recognition of difference. In Smith's view, the power of custom makes it the major battlefield where democracy is contested, akin to Gramsci's war of maneuver.

*Remembrance* on the other hand is an organic construction of democracy, a collective counter-memory that struggles over history and power through public dialogue. "It is a vision of public life which calls for an ongoing interrogation of the past that allows different groups to locate themselves in history while simultaneously struggling to make it" (Giroux, 1997, p.154). Like Smith's construction of remembrance, this project is aimed at the development of unique democracies, based on shared interests (themes) and a commitment to dialogue and praxis. In the spirit of a Freirean approach to dialogue (see dialogic preconditions, p.51 and also "democratic equivalencies" p.77) it was hoped that people would enter into this endeavor willing to listen deeply to each other. Freire's preconditions for dialogue and the concept of democratic equivalencies are discussed in greater detail in the second chapter of this dissertation.

The second structural issue dealt with decision-making, which is an important aspect of democracy. Though this process is fraught with issues of power, influence, and voice it is not well laid out in Freire's writings. Models for decision-making abound, as do facilitation methods. For the purpose of this study, decision-making models were not offered, and as it turned out, not needed. From my experience as a member of cohorts, boards, and neighborhood groups, I am well aware that decision-making can be a thorny issue, but in the realm of popular education, I believe it should be left open for interrogation, contestation, and group development.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was ongoing from the very beginning of the study. Questionnaires, field notes, reflections, interviews, and the process of transcription all informed the initial processing, and interpretation of the data. Remaining true to the principles of a Freirean approach, coding using the participant's own words, also called *in vivo coding*, was an important feature throughout data analysis. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith (2001) distills a Freirean perspective, which makes this point: "[Participant voice] ... is about retaining as much control over meaning as possible. "By 'naming the world' people name their realities" (p.157). This has been the overarching principal of subsequent coding refinement and has played a dominant role in the reporting of this study as well.

As implied in the statements above, the term coding is used carefully in this project, because the locus of knowledge production and meaning development resides within the interactions of the participants in dialogue. Coding refers to "the analytic process through which data are fractured, conceptualized and integrated to form theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.3) The data in this project are a collection of artifacts that represent the interactive pieces of communication used in dialogue, along with my impressions and observations as the researcher. As the research focus is dialogic, rather than re-naming the data, which in this case would be a dilution of the authentic voices of the participants, coding focused heavily on developing descriptive language that represents the data. My reflections, review of field notes, transcription analysis, and thematic development which occurred outside of dialogue, were in part summarized and discussed with the participants at the start of each subsequent session.

Central to this discussion is the distinction between researcher control, and researcher responsibility. While it may be possible to rupture sentences and phrases, reorganizing elements of speech to fit the researcher's purpose, this analysis will aim at a meaningful re-telling of the collective voices of the participants through the researcher's lens. In this way, the researcher is loosening control, letting go of the pretence of precision, in order to be responsible for the dialogic processes in play. It is also important to note that the researcher's responsibility also includes the process of problem posing, which is to actively question and surface contradictions that arise in dialogue.

There were several reflexive components built into the data collection and analysis. Field notes were reviewed immediately following the individual and group meetings. At times, these notes provided a means to capture questions and impressions, and what could be called "surprises". Summarizing these helped build on the recorded data produced in the meetings. All of the reflexive process and documentation helped to provide the context for explicitly writing researcher positionality into the text. The roles of the researcher are further defined near the end of the second chapter of this dissertation.

### *Primary Research Questions*

The main questions articulated in the project summary are descriptive by design:

- What issues will emerge as unifying themes, given the broad community orientation of generative theme development?
- What form of project will be envisioned?
- How does a Freirean approach to dialogics enable project development?

Some general questions that are of interest in the preparation of this study are:

- What form might these projects take?

- Who would take part in them and what would be the specific purposes of the participants?
- How would a project take steps to align with the broader society?
- How will workers address the contradictions of quality of life and globalization inherent in their lived experiences?
- What kinds of information might be needed and what sources of knowledge could be accessed?

More specific questions related to the defined processes of this study are:

#### *Developing Themes*

- What are the themes that emerge from the individual dialogues?
- How are the themes named and described?
- How do these descriptions identify or imply the individuals' perception of their position within the complex of power relations?
- What do the themes named by the individuals indicate in terms of process (such as change, hope, futility, integration with related themes, etc...)?

#### *Developing codes*

- What processes for developing sensory codes emerge in the interviews?
- How does the process undertaken to develop the sensory codes impact (confuse, clarify, broaden, focus, etc...) the themes as they are initially named and described?
- In what ways do the sensory codes effect the subsequent group discussion?



*Developing Group Praxis*

- Are the individual themes re-presented in the group discussion organized, integrated or used in any special ways?
- How do individuals in the group see themselves in relation to the group?
- What forms (if any) does a (theory-) action-reflection process take in the second and third sessions of group work and in the vision for future work?
- How are decisions made and what form(s) of democratic or undemocratic relations emerge?
- What perceived barriers to possibility (limit situations) emerge, and how are they named and described?
- Are these barriers perceived as penetrable or manageable, and if so, are strategies or actions envisioned or employed to pierce or move around them?

*Developing Social Movement*

- Are there proposals to connect with other groups and if so, how do these proposals develop within the scope of the project?
- Who are these other groups, how are they identified, and what intra-group relations are envisioned?
- Do envisioned connections link across socio-economic, political, and or geographic boundaries?
- In what ways do connections outside the group appear to strengthen or weaken the sustainability and or impact of the project?

### *Strategies to Promote Validity*

Many strategies to promote validity have already been mentioned in the research design section of this dissertation. However, in this section validity threats are examined more explicitly. R. Burke Johnson (1997) has constructed a concise and useful discussion on validity entitled “Examining the Validity Structure of Qualitative Research” found in the journal, *Education, Appendix B*. The article outlines six important elements of validity that I will use to frame this discussion. The six elements of validity are *descriptive, interpretative, theoretical, internal, external, and researcher bias*.

*Descriptive validity* refers to the researcher’s ability to capture the data accurately. In this study interviews were recorded in their entirety on a hand held digital recording device. The group work was audio recorded as well. Portions of the interviews, group work, and associated field notes were transcribed verbatim. The text of the interviews was double-checked during transcription, and at least one more time during thematic development. Examples of artifacts such as codes, agendas, and pictures are re-presented in this final document. Un-resolvable discrepancies or contradictions in the audio to text translations were addressed in follow-up with the participant.

*Interpretative validity* encompasses the representation of the intent of the participant. As stated earlier, the intention of this study is to use participant voice wherever possible (such as *in vivo coding*), and to verify intent all along the way (member check). In addition, there were several peer debriefings with colleagues and participants throughout the process of coding in order to widen the lens through which the data have been interpreted, and to ensure consistency with the interpretation of the participants’ intents.

One substantial interpretive challenge for this study will be the reading and voicing of silences. Ronald Sultana's book chapter titled "Ethnography and the Politics of Absence" (Sultana, 1995, chap.6) outlines several key silences within the text of ethnography. Referring to early work by Noelle Bissret and Terry Eagleton, Sultana points to the power of ideology that resides in silence, and unless it is actively exposed, ethnography tacitly supports hegemony. Seeking to identify Bissret's "the referent" means looking for constructs that are un-voiced, "outside and anchoring the symbolic relations of the text (Sultana, 1995 p.119)." Related to this notion, is what Sultana calls the "selective tradition" where by references to common sense, unspoken, remain un-interrogated. Reading these silences and probing for their ideological source should be an important element within any performative fieldwork. Within this project, silences were gently probed. Encouraging voice requires creating safety and space to respond. Sometimes the most important dimension of this space is time, and it is up to the facilitator to reconnect with the participant at an appropriate moment when the discussion can be looped back into the context of the original silence. Other times silence may be the result of a perception on the part of the participant that doesn't quite fit into the flow of the discussion. Helping participants widen, or adapt the framework so that adjacent ideas can be accommodated into the discussion is another important role of the facilitator. What might be called the tyranny of the extroverts is perhaps the most obvious process challenge for those in silence, it being easier to simply remain quiet. Active facilitation should include finding ways to amplify the voices of the introverts in the group. Sometimes this was accomplished by asking someone to recap the discussion, and to add their own thoughts. Other times, a quiet participant became clearly ready to speak, and it was simply a matter of creating the space in the dialogue for comment.

*Theoretical validity* refers to how accurately the data fit with the researcher's explanations of data, and any subsequent theoretical development. Johnson suggests extended fieldwork as one approach to this threat. Member check and peer review are also suggested practices, both of which have been utilized in this project. Since the focus is on re-presenting the views expressed as data, rather than deconstructing and reconstructing them, the hope is that participant meaning and any subsequent explanations based on these meanings have been well grounded in their reality. Since the grounded theory aspects of this study involve an inductive process that rests squarely on the data provided by the participants, voices of the participants remain in the forefront throughout the analysis and theoretical discussion. Theory triangulation is another suggestion, in which the researcher tries out a number of possible explanations to see which ones fit, and to surface possibly unforeseen patterns in the process. Though this seems like a natural process of description, it is my priority to contextualize rather than conceptualize the outcomes of this project, leaving conjectural processes to the conclusions and recommendations.

There are a few possibilities for overcoming problems with *internal validity* within the context of this study. In this case, a challenge to internal validity would be false statements on the part of the participants. One previously mentioned strategy is to clarify inconsistencies throughout the interview and group process. Another is to validate the veracity of historical claims by checking with other sources. Care needed to be exercised in this particular inquiry, because inconsistencies in data could represent a participant's uncritical or unreflective viewpoint, which could be valuable information that the researcher should not overlook or set aside. Another strategy employed in this study, which helps to overcome internal validity threats, is the number and variety of

participants. The relatively large number of participants (n=16), and the multi-layered typical sampling technique provide some leverage against a single person whose data are somehow compromised. Raymond Gordon suggests several interviewing issues that effect internal validity. When questions elicit embarrassment or shame, fear or dread, responses can become skewed or shutdown completely. Responses are filtered through the subject's perception of their experience, their ways of knowing, generalizing, and patterning both consciously and unconsciously (Madison, 2005, p. 33-36). Building on the preconditions that Freire sets forth for dialogue has been an important factor in overcoming internal validity threats such as these.

*External validity* focuses on how widely one can generalize the results of this study. This study is designed to represent the views, issues, and concerns of volunteers who are autoworkers at a specific Midwestern assembly plant. This information may be used to inform a pedagogical project at the plant and may help to generate the theoretical underpinnings of pedagogical projects in other labor or community settings. As this study represents one part of two potential educational projects, the data collection and analysis may prove to be an integral part of any popular education project. In short, generalization beyond this particular setting is not intentional, but may prove to be possible.

*Researcher bias* is perhaps the most important of all potential problems with any study, and work in qualitative studies magnifies this potential with its heavy reliance on the researcher's perspective and intuition for data analysis. As part of this tradition, a biased process within either a grounded theory, or ethnographic approach could produce skewed results. This study addresses this concern in three modest ways. The first is characterized by what might be called research transparency. In the spirit of collaboration, I made frequent checks with the participants in the study to clarify their

thinking, and to ask for guidance in interpreting their data. I also checked with some colleagues to critique the themes developed, and some of the analytical processes employed. Prior to publication, I will submit the interview and group work summaries to the participants for comment. This final member check is an intentional process aimed at limiting the bias in the findings further.

R. Burke Johnson (1997) suggests a strategy called reflexivity, which entails an accounting of researcher bias through critical self reflection (p.103). This reflection is a logical extension of the field notes taken during interviews, and has been a useful component to add to this study. Additional discussion on this topic can be found toward the end of the second chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Theoretical Underpinnings

This dissertation project has evolved out of personal beliefs, experiences, and understandings, gleaned from 14 years in Adult Education. It has also been developed out of a commitment to Critical Pedagogy, and represents a philosophical framework that celebrates the work of Paulo Freire, some that have worked closely with his ideas, and many others who have labored to construct critical theory in the struggle against ongoing oppression. My devotion to this work however, cannot be left un-interrogated. I have at my ready command the knapsack of white privilege, which Sonia Nieto (1998) has eloquently described, but mine is nearly overflowing, as I am also male, and solidly middle class, with deep roots into the owning class of turn of the century robber barons. Indeed, my gender, race, social and economic positioning is a most serious indictment of my resonance with Freire and other work associated with the male dominated Frankfurt School. Feminist critique of Critical Pedagogy and Freire in particular is substantive and calls for more organically generated critical theory from multiple viewpoints beyond class, and a greater awareness of how power works to silence many voices, continuously undermining attempts at democracy (Luke & Gore, 1992). Many, including myself, are also suspicious of Freire's integration of Christianity into his work, and its popularity within the arena of Liberation Theology. In keeping with the critical nature of this project, these and other objections suggest that the theoretical underpinnings of this project be articulated and examined.

The following discussion of theory in support of this project does not break easily into discrete conceptual packages. I have attempted to organize the first part of this section around the elements of a Freirean approach, beginning with individual

consciousness, and moving outward toward dialogue and group process. This is the juncture where I have inserted several visions of standpoint epistemologies to bridge the singular and plural. My construction of a Freirean approach also involves problem posing, and an *action-reflection* formation of praxis that includes a discussion around transformation. The topics of thematics and codes are followed by an examination of theory around overcoming “common sense” and limit situations (paralyzing barriers). The last section defines the roles of the researcher, which break down into *investigator*, *facilitator* and *co-learner*.

### *A Freirean Approach*

Freire’s writings express a wide-ranging theoretical approach to learning and the praxis of education. There is a spiraling nature to his logic, and inter-connectedness of the work, which challenges simple definitions. As Peter McLaren points out in his book *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (2000), “What was striking about his perspective was the unique way in which he wove together ideas from different scholarly terrains (p151).” As Ana Maria Araújo Freire and Donaldo Macedo write, as an historical being, Freire was open to many scholars and ideas:

The influence in Paulo's own way of thinking -- because he reinvented and surpassed in part or in the whole many of his masters -- of Marxism cannot be denied, as well as that of existentialism, personalism, or phenomenology. These are present in his reading of the world: Marx, Luk'acs, Sartre, Mounier, as well as Albert Memmi, Erich Fromm, Frantz Fanon, Merleau-Ponty, Antonio Gramsci, Karel Kosik, H. Marcuse, Agnes Heller, Simone Weill, and Amilcar Cabral (McLaren, 2000 p.152).

Daniel Schugurensky further elaborates on this theme. “Even though Freire was influenced by [many] authors, his merit was to combine their ideas into an original formulation. As Fausto Franco has pointed out, in reading Freire one may have the



impression of listening to familiar sounds everywhere, but at the same time experiencing an over all harmony of the whole that is new (McLaren, 2000, p.151),”.

Freire would probably be the first to admonish anyone embarking on a project that claims to utilize *Freirean* methods. I have appropriated Peter Mayo’s (1999) more apt word “approach” throughout this project, as Freire’s work is much more principled than prescriptive (p 74). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire undertook the articulation of a philosophical formation, which informed his principled and hopeful approach to the study of human learning and liberation. Many who read the text seeking practical nuggets of wisdom (as I did my first time through) choose not to engage fully in Freire’s philosophical conversation. This mistake has led to the widespread appropriation of particular pedagogical methods without the principles that informed them. In this discussion I will attempt to outline, the essential philosophical ideas I have used in preparing for this study.

### *The Individual*

As a theorist, Freire believed in the general principles of what could cautiously be labeled a Marxist approach to anti-capitalism and dialectics. Freire worked diligently to develop the dialectics of the subject and object relationship, with the same care as a master mason crafts the foundation of a building. It is the basis upon which everything else rests. In my reading of Marx, there is a tension between a generalizing theory and the specifics of reality; between the theoretical universality of a subject relative to its base (such as “the oppressor”, or “the oppressed”), and the reality of learners who are complex and unique individuals interacting with their surroundings in creative ways. Freire has been criticized for accepting this universalized oppression based on class. Kathleen Weiler’s critique, in her article “Freire and a Feminist Pedagogy of Difference” (1991,

p.120) suggests that Freire fails to indicate the complexity of individuals, particularly when a person is in the dual role of being oppressed, while oppressing others. While Freire does not address this complexity head on, there is an alternative reading that in my mind overcomes this problem.

Freire un-tethers the complexity of the individual from the deterministic chains of a material base by placing reality, not at some abstract location of universal truth, but linked to the object-subject relationship. In his book *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Freire (1975) articulates this by defining “reality” as the perception of the material object, by the subjective individual. The subject and object cannot be separated, and it is this inexorable linkage, which Freire contends, separates his views from those of idealists. Thus each individual has their own unique “subjectivities”, their experiences and understandings of these experiences, which can shade, filter, and distort their perception of the material object. In addition Freire sees individuals as active beings that not only have the ability to perceive and act upon the object of their reality, but also have the ability to perceive and act upon their subjective aspects of reality. In this way humans are able to actively interact in the construction of social subjectivities. It is in this interaction with social subjectivities, and in the perception of the object that Freire aims his pedagogical practice, moving toward developing subjectivities that allow for a clearer vision of the material object and an engagement with the forces which contest its location (Freire, 2002 chap. 3, 1975 p.13).

This theoretical stance fits well with what I have found; that people bring their own unique experiences and ever-changing understandings into a learning encounter. It is aligned with the notion that learning must begin where the learner is at; their reality not that of the “teacher”. This stance also fits well with the idea that transformational

learning takes place when new information stimulates a new reading of the subject-object relationship, and a new understanding of the former reading as a result of reflection.

Rather than some kind of divine epiphany, this movement in thinking comes from the challenge to better understand the conditions of one's reality, and by understanding why those conditions were less clear before. For Freire, this act of learning requires a dialogic encounter among people.

### *Standpoint Epistemologies*

It is a challenge to move from the singular person's reality to the collective, while holding tightly to the dignity, value, experiences and unique positioning of the person. I have found recent readings of standpoint epistemologies to be very useful in guiding between the twin traps of universalizing stereotypes, and what Nancy Naples calls the "relativism of endless difference." Early standpoint theorists came under significant criticism for privileging the voices of the oppressed in universalizing ways, by using the voice of a single "other" as a voice for all "others", through a deterministic reading of the subject-object linkage, and for privileging feminist gendered knowledge as having indigenous and primordial qualities. In an example of the latter, Meera Nanda (1997) takes standpoint to task in her critique of *Ecofeminism* for universally vilifying the western patriarchal science of India's Green Revolution without taking a critical view of the economic influence it has had on women, and for privileging women's knowledges as somehow unmediated by non-western historical patriarchal structures. These criticisms are well founded, and have led to a different interpretation of what standpoint means. One such re-reading can be found in Nancy Hartsock's reflective appraisal of her own earlier work in *Feminist Standpoint Revisited*. Discussing Antonio Gramsci, Hartsock (1998) interprets individuality as a "series of active relationships". Standpoint then is a

process of interpreting individuality where the person is perhaps the most important but not the only element to be taken into account. In Gramsci's words, we are an "ensemble of social relationships" and to modify one's personality is to modify the ensemble of relationships (p. 221).

Donna Haraway (1991) elaborates on the critique of relativism by suggesting that; [the] "alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connection called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology. Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere" (p. 191). The partial, locatable, and critical elements of standpoint lead Haraway in the direction of what she calls "situated knowledges." "Situated and embodied knowledges" are located within material subjects who are accountable and responsible for their reading and voicing of knowledge, rather than the disembodied un-locatable 'truth' of enlightened knowledge claims" (p. 190).

Haraway seeks "epistemologies of location" with the understanding that the view from the standpoint of the individual is complex and contradictory, not simple. The object of knowledge should be viewed as active, with agency if the fully dialectic relations of people are to be understood. In our search for the objective, we should seek out and privilege "contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing." This hopefulness is not linked to an easily summarized reading of people's knowledge, but rather to "self-critical partiality" (Haraway, 1991, p. 191).

Hartsock (1998) suggests that in order to understand the substance of the subjugated world, we need to develop epistemologies that privilege the content of the daily life of those on the margins (p. 222). Haraway feels we are "bound to seek

perspective from those points of view which can never be known in advance, which promise something extraordinary, that is, knowledge potent for constructing words less organized by axes of domination”( p. 6).

Nancy Naples articulates her construction of standpoint epistemologies as being made up of three different views in concert with one another (1997, p. 65 - 66, 1998, p. 340 - 342). Standpoint is embodied in the social identities of individuals as a way of contextualizing a person’s experiences and vantage points, though it should be viewed as ever changing. Describing the perspective of Stern and Krauss, Naples (1998) suggests that standpoint is also constructed in community as “standpoints are achieved in critical dialogue among those sharing similar experiences” (p. 340). Her third approach to standpoint emerges from Dorothy Smith’s work, and views “standpoint as a site of inquiry” rather than simply the proprietary knowledge of “the knower”. On a basic level, as a site of inquiry, standpoint epistemologies have the potential to merge with broader interrogations of power that provide a framework for integrating disparate knowledges. Smith suggests that this stance also has the potential to make visible the ways in which people utilize organizations and sites of power that are invisible to those working inside of them, a crucial perspective for community activists to keep in mind.

While I have appropriated these visions of feminist standpoint epistemologies by purposely unlinking them from gender specific feminist oppression, my intention is to honor the importance of standpoint, and to apply these ideas to broader spheres of oppression that include gender, race, class, and the multitude of ways power contours our lives. The standpoint epistemologies described above, provide a set of perspectives and language that bridge the singular and plural, moving in a unique direction, away from the maelstrom of identity politics and toward a critical theory of dialogue.

In his book *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994) Freire outlines what he calls “oneness, in difference”. In observing how the politics of difference is embedded in U.S. culture, Freire sees that moving toward a “unity in diversity” is the way for the so-called minorities (really the majority) to overcome the inscribed picture of themselves, developed by the colonizer. I think Freire would agree with much of what is proposed in these readings of standpoint, but perhaps re-center the discussion around the transformative value of people engaged in critical dialogue.

*Dialogue and the Word*

“our problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This my friends is the crux of our solitude.... The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own serves only to make us more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary”

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Nobel Prize address.

(Haraway, 1991, p. 243).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002), Freire originates his discussion on dialogue with its essential element; the word. Building from his background in literacy, Freire understood the liberating and transformative possibilities when people author their own unique vision of their world that challenges the images that have been inscribed upon them. Freire built his literacy projects around words that the participants generated out of their authentic world and with immediate meaning. These are what Freire called true words, words that embody praxis. Each word contains the two radically interacting dimensions of action and reflection. They are inseparable, for without action words lose their transformative quality becoming simply “idle chatter”, and without reflection words lose the dynamic quality of dialogue and become simply “activism” or “action for actions sake” (Freire, 2002, p. 87-88).

Freire defines dialogue as “the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world.” This is not simply people talking at each other, but requires careful listening, speaking, and thinking— “thinking which occurs only in and among people together seeking out reality. I cannot think for others, or without others, nor can others think for me” (Freire, 2002, p.88-91) .Dialogue involves a horizontal relationship that is founded on a profound *love for the world, humility*, which is an understanding that knowledge is fluid and ever re-creating, *faith*, or belief in other human beings and their desire to engage in the critical work of transformation once they are able to see the possibility, and *hope*, as an understanding that we are engaged in unfinished projects. If these preconditions are present in the act of dialogue, it will inspire mutual trust, which can only be developed out of dialogue. .

The final fundamental precondition of dialogue is a commitment to *critical thinking*, which engages all the other preconditions of love, humility, faith, and hope, at once. Critical thinking also incorporates the action-reflection aspects of the word, as well as a vision of the world as moving through time. It is this historical nature of critical thinking that provides dialogue the tools to overcome “limit situations”.

With the preconditions in mind, Freire (2002) contends “The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people” (p.95-6).

Myles Horton, in his collaboration with Freire, *We Make the Road By Walking*, (Horton, 1990) discusses the need for dialogue to begin with the participant’s concrete situation.

... They don’t need any games or any playing around. The one thing they know is their experience. They don’t need to homogenize it with other people’s experience. They want to talk

about their own experience. Then other people join in and say ‘Ah ha, I had an experience that relates to that.’ So pretty soon you get everybody’s experiences coming in, centered around one person’s experience, because that’s an authentic experience, not a synthetic experience (Horton, 1990, p. 167-8).

One call for such an intentional practice in education is what Henry Giroux outlines as “Boarder Pedagogies” in his book *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope* (1997). Theresa De Laurentis defines Boarder Pedagogies as “an ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourse, to re-write cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective... (Giroux, 1997, p.156).”

Boarder Pedagogies characterize an educational process for amplifying authentic counter-hegemonic discourses. Within the context of a Freirean approach, counter hegemonic discourse is not directly connected to hegemony as a form of reaction, rejection, or acceptance of dominant discourses, but rather exist independent of hegemonic construction. While organic knowledges are surely marked and mediated by hegemonic forces, these discourses have the possibility of a vision beyond limit situations and toward an originally developed form of praxis, (Livingstone & Sawchuck, 2000). This is what Giroux calls a “project of possibility”, in an outline of Linda Alcoff ‘s work. Alcoff writes “... you cannot mobilize a movement that is only and always against: you must have a positive alternative vision of a better future that can motivate people to sacrifice their time and energy toward its realization”. (Giroux, 1997, p. 158)

Giroux’s (1997) Boarder Pedagogies give a contemporary edge to Freire’s dialogics, and immediately resonate with standpoint epistemologies. It is interesting to note that Giroux used the idea of boarders in describing Freire’s physical and intellectual movement as an exile; how his homelessness, his life on the edge of poverty, and his life on the edge of Western European culture and thought helped him to develop a unique



perspective. This helps to explain why such a wide variety of people are drawn to this “Border Intellectual” from disparate physical and intellectual locations (McLaren, 2000 p.152). It also helps explain Freire’s preoccupation with organic counter-hegemonic dialogue and the potential for those on the margins to name their world in ways that construct new visions beyond the boundaries of dominant discourse.

Giroux demands that these organic namings (experiences) be more than simply voiced.

It is equally important for teachers to help students find a language for critically examining the historically and socially constructed forms by which they live. Such a process involves more than ‘speaking’ one’s history and social formation, it also involves engaging collectively with others in a pedagogical framework that helps to reterritorialize and rewrite the complex narratives that make up ones life" (Giroux, 1997, p.158).

This is the aim of Freire’s dialogics. It is important to point out once again, that the language developed in this critical process is not an appropriation of a facilitator’s prescription and thus a form of hegemonic discourse. Through problem posing, and the dialogic process of *action-reflection*, words take on the meaning of those who speak them.

Jurgen Habermas (1979) arrived at a similar conclusion in his examination of the elements of social action. The two main pathways toward social action are communicative action, based on explicit speech acts and mutually recognized information (validity claims), or strategic action, which is essentially doing what you are told to do. Freire would undoubtedly dismiss strategic action as “banking”, or propaganda, or activism without reflection. Habermas proposes that the only way for people to directly understand validity claims, is through communicative action (p. 209). While for Habermas, some strategic action (“banking”) can be useful if it leads to

understanding through communicative action, Freire prefers to focus on the activity that leads directly to understanding, and thus his emphasis on dialogue. Peter Mayo (1999) brings this point up in his comparison of Freire and Antonio Gramsci called *Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education*. Gramsci also believed in the need for some traditional lecture as a way of providing background information to workers who had no exposure to critiques of the systems they found themselves under. I think that Freire and Gramsci held different positions on how rigor should be initiated in a program, but were of a like mind about the demand for rigor. Freire feels that once a limited situation is understood dialectically, it is transformed into a challenge that humans are intrinsically driven to pursue. Therefore in the process of dialogue, praxis and problem posing, rigor will become a group demand, rather than an institutional or individual (teacher) demand.

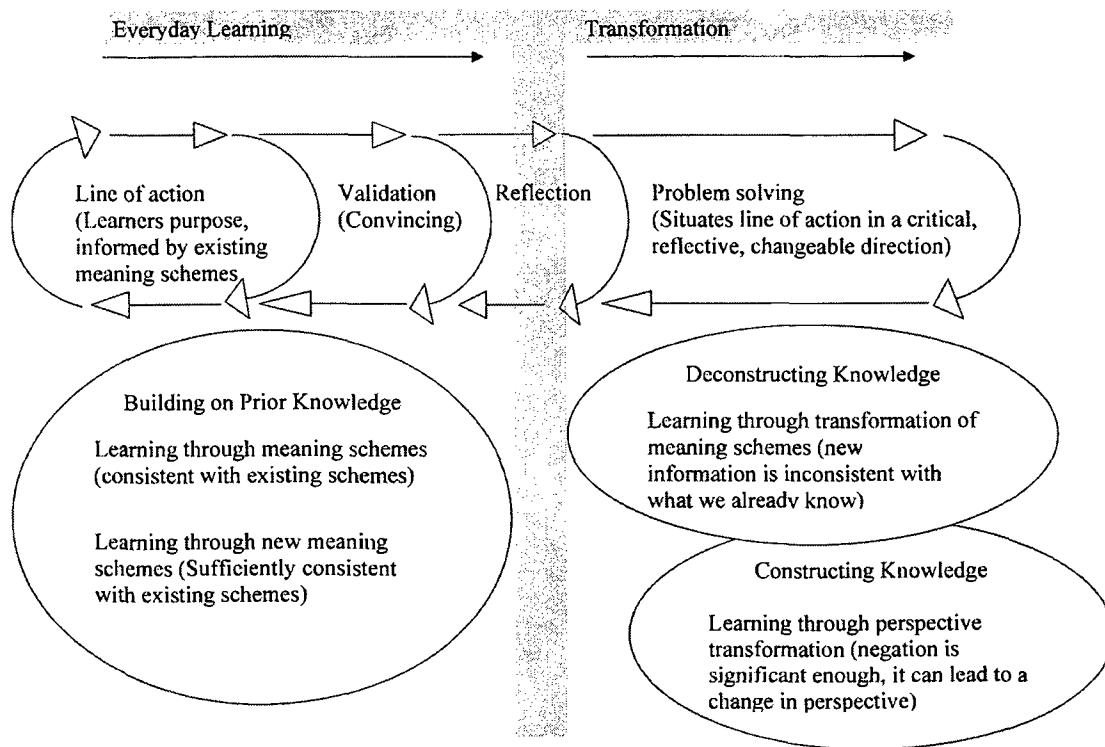
Problem posing in dialogue is the purposeful attempt on the part of the facilitator to push the conversation in a critical direction. Freire's (2002) approach encourages a representation of the participants themes, and an amplification of contradictions inherent in them. "Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response-not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action" ( p. 96).

Freire's (2002) pedagogical stance demands problematizing themes in dialogue which naturally initiates an action-reflection cycle of praxis. Praxis is the engine of liberation, emancipation, and at its core, transformation. "In problem-posing education, people develop the power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves: they come to see world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83).

Jack Mezirow synthesizes the research of Habermas and others, such as Gregory Bateson, Edward Cell, and James Loder in his book *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (1991), which touches upon this idea of problematizing in a dialogic *action-reflection* context. Pulling together this work, Mezirow articulates a vision of transformation theory that substantiates Freire's ideas on problem posing, though from a significantly more abstract perspective. It is difficult to summarize the collage of theories Mezirow pieces together, but there are two streams of thought which weave together well for this discussion. Edward Cell (1991) defines four reflective types of learning that have had an important impact on Transformation Theory (see Figure 1). These four types of learning are based on two distinct learning constructs. The term *meaning scheme* refers to an interpretation of experiences. These interpretations are central to our fact gathering process. The term *meaning perspectives* refers to our developed frameworks. These frameworks define what we often call our personal perspectives of the world. *Learning through meaning schemes* includes learning by habit and stereotypic responses. *Learning new meaning schemes* is the form of learning where we are gaining new learning, that is "sufficiently consistent" with the schemes we have already developed (p. 92). *Learning through transformation of meaning schemes* is achieved when new information is inconsistent with what we already know or believe. Through reflection on this new information we question the basis of our assumptions and begin to see the inadequacy of previously held notions and beliefs (p. 94).

This is the point at which we no longer accommodate but begin to negate ideas that have been developed. If this negation is significant enough, it can lead to a change in perspective. *Learning through perspective transformation* occurs when we find ourselves with incomplete or inconsistent frameworks as a result of critical reflection and search for

Figure 1. Elements of Mezirow's transformative learning framework



reorganizing or a redefining effect on our frameworks (p. 94). This is the area of transformation that Critical Pedagogy fosters, and the aim of Freire's dialogics.

Mezirow (1991) continues his synthesis of Cell and Habermas by adding four components to Cell's four types of learning to complete his basic structure of Transformation Theory. These components interact in all types of learning and help to create a developmental element in the theory. The first is what Habermas calls the *line of action* or the learner's purpose. This is a constant influence in learning, which is informed by existing meaning schemes (p. 66), and moves the subject in a particular direction of inquiry (p. 95). Another component from Habermas is the process of validation in which enough evidence is gathered to adopt an idea as being convincing.

The third component, reflection, is present in all four of Cell's concepts and is of critical importance to Freire. The last component, *problem solving*, is also a crucial element in all four of Cell's concepts (p. 95). Problematizing learning situates the subject's line of action in a critical, reflective, and potentially changeable direction. As Mezirow states, Habermas saw this situation as a sequence of events, which "... goes from the identification of a problem through reflection, empirical or consensual validation and imaginative insight to making a new interpretation" (p. 66).

While quite a-political in nature, this version of Transformation Theory provides language for analyzing communicative activity within dialogue, and surfaces avenues on which meaning schemes and perspectives travel in transformation. Freire (1998, 2002) might call *the line of action* "ingenious curiosity" and while honoring the participants purpose, would also understand that there is a great deal of "common sense" which inhibits the line of action from overcoming a limit situation. Because *ingenious curiosity* is based on the concrete reality of the learner, woven with creativity, it naturally becomes part of the content of dialogue, and problem posing. What Freire seeks is movement through reflection toward a more critical reading of common sense, and toward what he calls an "epistemological curiosity". Freire (1998) points out however, it is the responsibility of the educator (and the institutions of education) to problem pose common sense ideas, and stimulate a dialectical and critical undertaking (p.35-39). As part of this responsibility, the facilitator develops the program content out of generative themes and codes, which represent the reality of the participant.

### *Thematics and Codes*

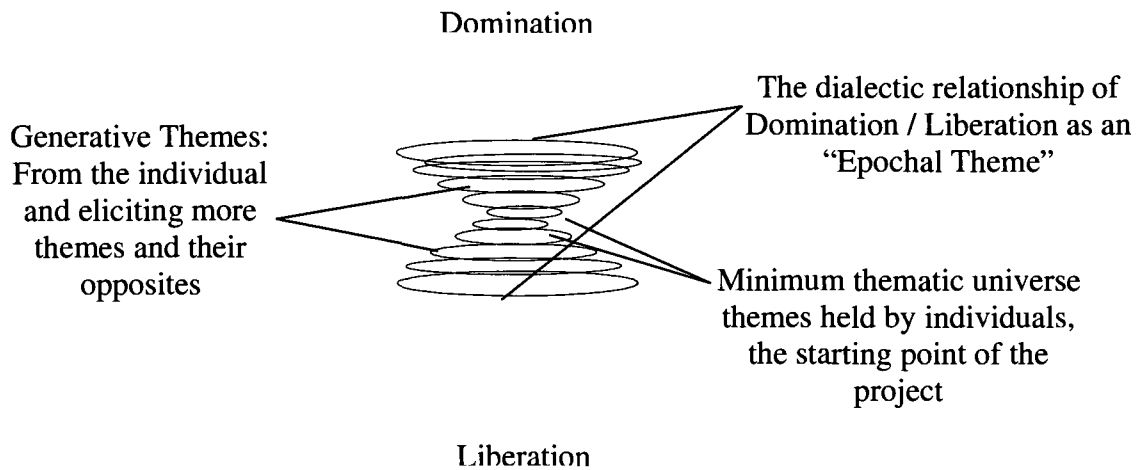
At its most essential level, the surfacing of themes is a process that involves the *action-reflection* interaction of *the word*, spoken by a perceiver of their subjective-

objective world. The investigation of themes is an investigation into the thinking of people, and their reality. These *themes* are named out of a person's reality, and reflect the issues and concerns most relevant and perceivable to that individual, at that moment. Freire considers themes to be like a series of overlapping concentric circles moving from the general (epochal themes) to the particular of the minimum thematic universe (see Figure 2). Generative themes can be found within these concentric circles, and when subject to critical analysis (decoding) unfold into multiple themes. This is what Freire refers to as thematic fan, unfolding new themes as a natural development of the critical decoding process.

All themes contain limit situations, and are contained within limit situations. One of the main challenges in developing generative themes is a condition in which a person only has partial or obscured perception of the limit situations in which they find themselves. This is where the insertion of what Freire calls "hinged codes" may be useful. Hinged codes help link the limit situation to its contradictory opposite. If a group has no vision of what life could be like beyond the reality of a limit situation, then proposing an alternative reality in the form of a code, can begin to stimulate the dialectical process of critical thinking.

Hinged codes can provide a vision in which the participants, through decoding, begin to formulate a clearer perception of their reality, to come to see themselves within some aspects of the coded situation. If the participant's oppression is so complete that alternatives are not imaginable, then the codes may act as an abstraction to introduce the possibility of an alternative, and to begin developing dialectical thinking. Again, the idea is not to put words in people's mouths, or to rely on abstraction as a way out of reality. Freire also cautions that dialogue must remain centered on the perceived reality of the

Figure 2. The dialectical relationship between themes and their opposites




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person(s) (in subject-object relation) rather than on the “fixing” of the individual. As long as the investigation remains centered on deconstructing reality, it will move toward a clearer identification of themes, and ultimately toward a more critical consciousness.

Freire envisions themes as dialectical in nature, with each theme having an oppositional thematic. The mirror image that is realized when a theme is surfaced, reveals its dynamic nature, and implies the scope and trajectory of the work ahead in overcoming the limit situations inherent in the theme. This reflective deconstruction and creative reconstruction of themes in dialectical relations is an essential task in the development of group praxis leading to social movement.

Epochal themes are broad in the sense that they contain major limit situations that affect a great many people. As with all themes, “epochal units interrelate in the dynamics of historical continuity” (Freire, 2002, p. 101). Thus they are ever transforming, as history is ever transformed. Freire feels that the major epochal theme of our time is

domination, with its antithesis liberation. The theme of domination contains all of the themes that interact within the epochal theme. Each person perceives and lives within a complex of generative themes, and it is within this thematic universe, the collective minimum thematic universe of the group, that the pedagogical content of the project has been developed.

Freire goes into quite some detail about the development and use of codes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002). Codes in Freire's literacy projects are sensory representations of the participant's reality. In Freire's view, the investigators develop codes, in order to re-present a real situation in the lives of the participants as a beginning point for problem-posing. Codes must be familiar enough to be recognizable, and complicated enough to stimulate a wide variety of perceptions and possibilities in the dialogic decoding process. If the images are too explicit, they can fall into the trap of "propaganda" which extinguishes reflection. If the images are too enigmatic, they become puzzles. Except in the case of hinged codes, codes are not used as abstractions in this framework, but rather re-presentations of concrete reality.

A main goal of using codes in dialogue is to develop a complex of interrelated themes, and to identify a set of contradictions, which form the basis for problem-posing. The process of *decoding* as an act of dialogue, however, can also stimulate transformation. McLaren's distillation of Abdul JanMohamed's deconstruction of Freire's themes and their opposites, provides a vivid description of the process of decoding and its transformative possibilities (McLaren, 2000, p.156-8). Based on the work of Freire, Ernesto Laclau and Michel Foucault, JanMohamed's effort takes on a decidedly more political approach to describing transformation than Habermas and Mezirow.



McLaren (2000) suggests that Freire views both history and culture as actively constructed knowledges, and as such are always unfinished projects. JanMohamed asserts that Freire envisions hegemony in the same way. By naming their own world, and by seeking to understand the power relations of disenfranchisement, participants are also implicitly seeking to understand the power relations of coercion. Freire's problem posing stimulates "clearer antagonisms" between the systems of domination and the concrete situations of oppression in which people find themselves. In a sense, this is an act of territorializing, of more clearly demarcating the boundaries inscribed by dominance. But Freire seeks more than recognition: He seeks action, a movement of the participants' subjectivity. JanMohamed posits that this action requires a simultaneous suspension of identity, a distance from one's own subjective position, enabling critique, while identifying one's self in the process of "reidentification". Hegemonic inscription is likened to a geologic formation of sediment. These perceived subjectivities act as heavy layers laid down over time, in-process, but with vast inertia, making direct change very difficult: While still dealing with the concrete object, a change of perspective becomes imperative (McLaren, 2000). This perspective change is akin to Victor Turner's concept of liminality which D. Soyini Madison (2005) describes as a:

... state of being, neither here nor there- neither completely inside nor outside a given situation, structure or mindset. Relatively free of norms, guidelines, and requirement, liminality ...is the space of greatest invention, discovery, creativity and reflection. ...where we are at the threshold of systems, not stepping into the system to the right nor the system to the left, but reflectively, creatively or ceremoniously assessing both (p.158-159).

Turner suggests that this can be a dangerous space for people who struggle with becoming unglued and disconnected, but as a paradigm for constructing dialogue, and distancing from limit situations, it seems very useful.

McLaren's (2000) synthesis continues. The act of "reidentification", for JanMohamed, is not simply holding a vision of one's own reality, and its dialectical opposite, but also envisioning an alternate reality bound dialectically to the same contradiction. Foucault names this dialectic relationship "utopia/ heterotopia," and as is often the case with Foucault's constructs, heterotopic sites are open to contestation and appropriation. In Freire's dialogic decoding there is the potential to reterritorialize the inscribed boundaries of domination through the articulation of a vision of one's own "antagonistic, transgressive potentiality". (McLaren, 2000, p.157). From this viewpoint, transformation demands not only movement of social subjectivities, but of political subjectivities as well. It is a view toward a liberation achieved through agency.

For the purposes of this study, I depart somewhat from Freire's described methodology for developing codes though how they are used in dialogue remains consistent with his approach. As part of the interview process, I assisted the participants in developing their own codes, which were used in the early stages of the group work. In Freire's research, the development of codes is the work of the facilitator, following an elaborate process of investigation. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*(2002), codes are developed for use in a regional or national literacy movement. They are constructed with the input of interdisciplinary teams of professionals in the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and volunteers from among the project participants. The investigators steep themselves in the community, examining work, leisure, family life, politics, etc...( p.109-113).

In the context of this project, "community" is a nebulous term. People in these groups live in urban, suburban, and rural settings, in different states, in different economic, social, political, and even class locations. They have some common

understandings about the broader culture tied to their industrial work experiences, and in some ways, a shared past through their work. However the tasks set forth in these projects are not limited to work, and began with themes not initially connected to work.

My interest in assisting participants in the development of codes is grounded in striving to maintain authentic voice throughout the project, surfacing thematic contradictions and dialectic thinking in the very early stages of the project, and tapping into the creativity of the participants. It is also based on the hope, that surfacing the participant's visions of contradictions inherent in their own named themes, will accelerate the process of group understanding around these themes, that I felt were essential if the dialogic potential of the group work were to mature within the limited timeframe of this study.

As with codes developed by a facilitator, these investigations center around themes, their apparent contradictions, and in the case of well-developed themes, perhaps some form of dialectical vision. Some people found task of code development to be too daunting. The process of preparing for group work was not dependent on participants accomplishing this task. I was prepared to developed codes as a facilitator, if there were significant themes that remained un-codified, or if the codes developed were too explicit or enigmatic, to use Freire's (2000) demarcations. In addition, I was prepared to insert "hinged" codes, facilitator designed, to un-stick dialogue mired in an impenetrable limit situation. In this project, no facilitator developed codes were used, and the task of developing codes was a participant centered, and participant generated activity.

As a responsible member of this study, and as facilitator, it was my goal to stimulate and amplify the critical aspects of re-presentation. To listen for emerging contradictions, dialectical thinking, and to help the participants reflect upon and develop

these threads into something actionable. I am suggesting here that participant code development through facilitated dialogue may indeed produce more meaningful, less academically mediated, more subjugated and possibly insurgent readings of the themes. By surfacing and amplifying Haraway's (1991) vision of situated knowledges within the interview process, and participating in a creative process that naturally takes advantage of the distancing that JanMohamed (McLaren, 2000) suggests, participant codes have the potential to act as initial sites of inquiry in the early stages of the group work. As a site of inquiry, they may surface articulations of common sense, as well as interpretations or representations of popular culture. These cultural artifacts demand interrogation, and through reflection-action, perhaps a re-appropriation or transformation of meaning.

#### *Common Sense*

Freire's pedagogical formation is consistently built from the foundations of the individual's reality that is situated in perception of the subject-object linkage. This commitment is evident throughout his writings. In *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994), Freire recalls a discussion with Lucio Lara, one of the leaders of the movement for the liberation of Angola. Even when confronted with people whose belief and knowledge systems privileged talismans and spells over military discipline and tactics, where their very survival hung in the balance, Freire was unwavering:

But no wise, not even here, where going beyond common sense knowledge was a matter of life and death, would it be legitimate to belittle that knowledge or look down upon it. It must be respected. Transcendence of commonsense knowledge, I was already saying back in those days, must be achieved only by way of that very knowledge" (p.146).

The common sense beliefs and knowledges of the participants in this study do not stand out in such stark relief as the talismans and spells of Lara's Angolan compatriots. Indeed, surfacing these beliefs should be an essential aspect of any popular education project, clarifying dialectic thinking, and demystifying widely held ideas that undermine a group's interest. An example is the construction of race in the U.S., which fails to see whiteness as a demarcation for critique. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1997) indicates that we "have come to accept the notion of race as a category that serves the purpose of distinguishing those who are 'not White' in the society." In order to have meaningful discussions about race, we must center them on a "construction of whiteness" (p. 127-141). Zeus Leonardo (2005) points out that taking an historical look at race acts in the U.S. reveals a much more out of balance picture, one in which racial dialogue must center on "a discourse of supremacy", a location that reveals oppressed standpoint at the outset. The submerged awareness of whiteness on the part of white participants will undoubtedly play a part in any project with critical intentions.

Another example is the absence of a working class identity. Stanley Aronowitz (1989) proposes that institutions such as "schools and the media consort to persuade, cajole, and by the absence of representations force working class kids to accept middleclass identities as the only legitimate option to them." The results of such hegemonic force on class identity is mixed, with some people failing to live up to their middle class vision, and others rejecting the identity, resulting in a kind of "cultural homelessness" for both groups (p. 207).

Paula Allman, in her book *Revolutionary Social Transformation* (2001) takes up Freire's notion of "the oppressor within", suggesting that the "oppressor's ideology- ways of thinking, motives and ways of behaving- actually penetrates the subjectivities of the

oppressed" (p. 103). The powerful create the rules by which the oppressed are gauged, and even organic leadership can fail to see the oppressive relations they might embrace.

Michael Apple's chapter in the book *Race Identity and Representations in Education* (1993) called "Constructing the Other: Rightist reconstructions of Common Sense" probes deeply into the ideological landscape of the U.S., naming many of the major common sense beliefs that have slanted our collective reality, eroding communally held rights. There has been a constant move toward greater property rights, and more recently the "free consumer" protections which have moved us from the good of the people to the good of the commercial, as if outsourcing, cheap consumer goods no matter what the true cost, and vouchers (schools as businesses) are really in our best interest. Language has been appropriated and fashioned to appear liberal, but designed to advance fascism. Driven by a fabricated "Siege mentality", the right is developing what Stuart Hall likens to an "Authoritarian Populism" which is building a powerful ideological consensus akin to Antonio Gramsci's concept of war of position. As Gramsci feared, this hopeful weapon of resistance by the oppressed, through cultural influence that counters hegemony, can be appropriated by those in power for the purposes of fascism (Forgacs, 2000, p. 430-431). Apple (1993) sees common sense as ideological terrain and asks whose voice forms that ideology.

How these ideologies manifest themselves in people's realities is the point of contestation, though for Freire, this struggle begins with critical reflection and action, rather than mere revelation. In *Education for a Critical Consciousness* (1973), Freire identifies several different types of thinking. He sees the basis of critical consciousness as resting on what Alvaro Vieira Pinto defines as "... things and facts as they exist empirically, in their causal and circumstantial correlations". A clear understanding of

causality is what separates critical consciousness from other forms such as naïve and magical consciousness. Freire holds that naïve consciousness views causality as “static, established fact, and thus deceived in its perception.” Pinto also suggests “naïve consciousness considers itself superior to facts, in control of facts, and thus free to understand them as it pleases.” Freire (1973) likens magical consciousness to a form of blind religious faith in which a person gathers facts empirically, but consciously “attributes to them a superior power by which it is controlled and to which it must therefore submit. Magical consciousness is characterized by fatalism, which leads men to fold their arms, resigned to the impossibility of resisting the power of facts” (Freire, p. 43-45).

Naïve and magical consciousness is validated in our culture, creating the substrate for hegemonic power, common sense, and the fatalism which consumes so much of our potential transformative energies. For Freire (1973), the way toward critical consciousness is dialogue, participant centered content (as in the use of themes and codes) in concert with critical processes such as decoding and problem posing (p. 45). I would also add the action- reflection dynamic of praxis to these ideas. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2002) Freire points out that “Even if peoples thinking is superstitious or naïve, it is only when they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change. Producing or acting upon their own ideas – not consuming those of others – must constitute that process” (p. 108). In keeping with Freire’s philosophical project, “Critical consciousness is integrated with reality; naïve consciousness superimposes itself on reality; and fanatical consciousness, whose pathological naiveté leads to the irrational, adapts to reality” (p. 44).

### *Limit Situations*

Moving through and beyond the subterfuge of common sense is of critical importance in pursuing a Freirean approach to social movement. As people develop a clearer vision of reality, and causality, they will also develop a clearer apprehension of limit situations. Freire (2002) views limit situations as indicators of the possibility beyond rather than impenetrable boundaries. These are not fatalistic demarcations, but rather impediments to liberation that require, not resigned passivity, but action to overcome. Limit situations that distort and block one's ability to view themes, block the vision of an "untested feasibility" (p.102). Through Freire's dialogic process, people work to gain a clear apprehension of the limit situation, and the untested feasibility of overcoming it. In this way, a clear apprehension of the limit situation also reveals the scope and trajectory of the work that needs to be done to overcome it.

Freire does not fully develop the concept of overcoming limit situations due in large part to his belief in people and their abilities once they apprehend a challenge through dialogue:

Thus, it is not the limit-situations in and of themselves which create a climate of hopelessness, but rather how they are perceived by women and men at a given historical moment: whether they appear as fetters or as insurmountable barriers. As critical perception is embodied in action, a climate of hope and confidence develops which leads men to attempt to overcome the limit-situations (Freire, 2002, p. 101).

The work of overcoming limit situations is also grounded in the same concrete reality as other aspects of Freire's approach:

This objective can be achieved only through action upon the concrete, historical reality in which limit-situations historically are found. As reality is transformed and these situations are superseded, new ones will appear, which will in turn evoke new limit acts (Freire, 2002, p. 101).



Integrating this cycle of apprehending limit situations into the body of a Freirean approach unifies the overall vision of a action-reflection praxis for social movement. Themes generated out of the participant's concrete reality are re-presented in the form of codes to animate dialogue. The codes stimulate the awareness of contradictions inherent in the themes revealing an emerging vision of limit situations, and their dialectical opposite. If a limit situation is clearly apprehended through critical reflection then a segment of work, a challenge undertaken by the group, naturally leads to action. The trajectory of this action is toward an untested feasibility that represents movement in the direction of the dialectical opposite of the limit situation. Myles Horton (1989) also recognized the importance of having an as yet unrealized goal. In order to keep the pedagogical project moving forward, it is important to keep "... your eyes on the 'ought to be' ... the kind of world in which we need to live" (p. 232).

Because limit situations are shrouded in common sense and fatalistic myth, and our apprehension is often filtered through naive or magical consciousness this process will, most likely, not be smooth or instantaneous, but rather incremental and uneven. The driving force of this process is ingenious curiosity: However, clearer apprehension requires a shift to the more critical epistemological curiosity. It is in this shift to epistemological curiosity that Freire's approach becomes transformative, as the participants will begin to negate meaning schemes and perspectives, constructing new ones.

In my experience, there has been a gap between theory surrounding transformation and social movement, between developing a critical practice as an individual on the one hand, and making social change as a group on the other. Social movement is most vulnerable to what might be called the entropy of limit situation

inertia. As people struggle to change their world, acting within a system that is designed to resist change, the energy required must be sizable and sustainable. As is often the case, groups engage the system for as long as they can, falling away as energy and resources are depleted. I suspect that Freire would find his way out of this trap, by re-focusing our attention on reality. As outlined in several parts of this analysis, Freire understands reality to be the perception of an individual's subjectivities in continuous relation to the object of their reality. Freire would make the case that these are three inseparable dimensions of reality. Foucault might refer to them as an interacting and ever changing constellation. In this regard, it is easy to see why Freire places a strong emphasis on the study of cultural reality in his large-scale literacy projects, rather than aiming more directly at systems of oppression. Freire's goal is always to work for a clearer understanding: of the object, of the limit situation, of contradictions, of the dialectical opposite of a generative theme. All of this enables change in the perception and subjectivities, which informs action on the object, and the forces that shape the object of their reality. The whole constellation must be moving for transformation and in concert with other people's constellations in order to obtain the power for social movement. Social movement then, requires an organizing element, based on an understanding of what needs to take place. This implies a collective understanding of a beginning, a place to start.

If a group is even somewhat diverse, it may have difficulty arriving at a collective understanding of a beginning, even with a clear understanding of a limit situation, it's dialectical opposite and a well developed untested feasibility. One possible bridge would be to introduce JanMohamed's vision of Foucault's (McLaren 2000) concept of heterotopic sites. By purposefully developing a collective vision of a heterotopia, a group could in effect create its own space that is at once electric with the potential for action,

and constructed out of the participants' reality in relation to the limit situation and the dialectic opposite. Thus each individual, in the act of re-identification, participating in dialogue, advances the construction of a shared understanding of where they are; in other words, a beginning. In theory, it might play out in the following manner. The group undertakes the dialogic steps of apprehending the limit situation, and as the scope and trajectory of at least a portion of the work surfaces, the group moves through action – reflection, into a heterotopic positioning. In this newly created heterotopic stance, in the process of re-identifying themselves, with distance, creativity, and imagination, the group initiates action. This is akin to what Freire (2002) calls an awareness of *becoming* which through dialogue, propels people out of the quagmire of oppression which has held them (p.173). Once a group realizes change as a series challenges, then through this action, which Alvaro Vieira Pinto calls “limit-acts” (Freire, 2002, p. 99), the praxis of agency is initiated.

In this study, the notion of heterotopia was introduced near the beginning of each of the second sessions, as a way to envision the horizon more clearly. Initiating the idea of heterotopia did seem to have a positive effect on the hopeful nature of this work, though perhaps not in the way that Foucault or JanMohamed may have envisioned.

#### *The Roles of the Researcher*

The underlying basis of a Freirean approach to any pedagogical activity is that it is a political activity. There is no way to insulate education, no way to close the door on the institutions that advance the agenda of those in power, no way to close the books of a slanted curriculum, and no way to inoculate the participants from the hegemonic influences on their ways of knowing and acting. Rather than pretend that we can de-politicize this experience, Freire's answer is to expose, problematized, and tease out the

contradictions inherent in the political themes which surface in dialogue. Indeed the outgrowth of dialogue, which should be the action-reflection process of praxis, is inherently a political action.

The pervasive nature of the political has far reaching implications for this study, not only in the performative aspects just alluded to, but also in the ever more directed politics of the analysis. Descriptions, the way ideas are gathered and grouped, the shades of gender, sexuality, race, and class that are allowed to color this work, or are ignored, are all politically charged actions. As Nancy Naples (1998) points out, "All constructions of community are political constructions no matter who defines the boundaries" (p. 336). Surfacing this issue in the beginning makes clear the challenge for claims of objectivity, scientific empiricism, and bias free observation.

D. Soyini Madison, in her book *Critical Ethnography* (2005), suggests that the researchers identify an investigative stance as a way of exposing these political decisions to inquiry in the text of the study. There are several positional models described by Madison, that range from investigators using the scientific method as a shield, attempting to remain invisible within the text, those who add interpretation and situate the study in historical and cultural context but remain only "vaguely present", and those who take an active, critical stance, attempting to capture their own intentions in the text. Madison (2005) borrows Michelle Fines naming of a critical positioning as "activism", in which the investigator takes "a clear position in intervening on hegemonic practices and serves as an advocate in exposing the material effects of marginalized locations while offering alternatives" (p. 6).

While taking an active and critical stance in the text seems forthright, Fine and Weis (1998) caution that positionality demands more. Qualitative research has often

reproduced a “contradiction filled ... colonizing discourse of the ‘Other’” (p. 265). What is missing in this discourse is an interrogation of the investigators construction of the other. Michelle Fine calls this line of inquiry “working the hyphen” between Self and Other. It is a process aimed at interrupting Othering.

First I examine the hyphen at which self and other join in the politics of everyday life, that is the hyphen that both separates and merges personal identities with our inventions of Others. I then take up how qualitative researchers work this hyphen... . Through a messy series of questions about methods, ethics, and epistemologies as we re-think how researchers have spoken ‘of’ and ‘for’ Others while occluding ourselves of our own investment, burying the contradictions that percolate at the Self-Other hyphen (Fine & Weis, 1998, p. 265).

Fine and Weis (1998), struggle to surface the process of sifting the deconstruction and reconstruction of the voices that emerge from the work through intentional reflexivity. They point to what Laurel Richardson has called “writing stories” about our practice of writing. These writings can aim at either verifying the investigators process, or act as a subjective platform for describing how the influences of relationships, political forces, academic pressures, etc..., impinge on the work, and sorting through the context of how the writing is constructed (p. 265).

Freire works the hyphen by taking a dialectical position that he often refers to as the teacher-student, with its antithesis being the student-teacher. Entering into a dialogic process means that the educator must also be a learner, and likewise the student a teacher. Freire means something very specific by these terms, not that the roles are switched, but that they are interconnected, and work simultaneously in the construction of knowledge. Paula Allman (2001) suggests that it also means that students and teachers must change their relations to knowledge. “In other words, being or relating differently is inextricably bound up with knowing differently" (p. 97). This is consistent with the belief that

knowledge is forever changing, and educational praxis is always in motion. Freire's action-reflection vision of praxis applies to the researcher as stringently as it does to the participant. Inserting Fine, s, and Richardson's ideas into a reflexive process that elaborates on Freire's dialectical hyphen fits well into the overall Freirean approach I use for this study. Analysis should include an exploration into the researcher-participant hyphens and become an explicit thematic element in the written text.

There are several researcher roles I fulfilled in this project including investigator, facilitator, and co-learner. These roles were not played out one at a time, in a split brain fashion, but rather they reflect three distinguishable sets of responsibilities, which were maintained throughout the project. As investigator, it is my charge to provide a vivid picture of the participant context, the emerging issues and themes, and their vision for developing a project, as well as a critical analysis of the fieldwork and evidence of transformative movement. The product of this effort and the resulting analysis has been developed with continual feedback from participants and colleagues, but in the end, it is shaped by my sense of what is important. This requires that I make clear my intentions, hopes, and disappointments with the project data, while following the contours between what Fine and Weis (1998) have called "the demi-fictions of empiricism" (p.264) and various forms of theory. As investigator, I have the first and last words, my reflexive spin politicizes the work in ways of my choosing; and it is my responsibility to choose from the artifacts of the participant's reality in dialogue, and to reconstruct them with respect for their authorship.

The second part of the demi-fiction, theory, requires a note of caution. I am differentiating here between two very different types of theory, one that is applied to the project by the investigator, brought in from external sources, and that which is

organically generated within the group process of dialogue. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton provide insight into the hegemonic power of externally derived theory in their book *Theory As Resistance* (1994). Their evaluation of theory as it is taught in university suggests that theory is often used to endow research with authority beyond the explanatory. They hold a contradictory position, understanding theory “to be ... an ‘intelligibility effect’ – a historical understanding of the material processes and contradictory relations through which the discourses of culture make sense” (p. 31). Their stance is to aim theory at critique of “material intelligibilities”, what can be discerned in reality, and to construct historical knowledges that are expressions of “social totality” (p. 12). The idea of utilizing theory as a way to bring focus to reality and to help integrate new knowledge into a broad view of what they call “social collectivity” beckons for as much exposure to group interaction and interpretation as possible. It holds more authentic power and is of more value to the project, channeled through dialogue in the performative aspect, rather than residing in the more insular and speculative analysis.

The aim of this project is toward developing an action-reflection form of praxis that is ultimately informed by organically generated critical theory. Stephen Brookfield in his book *The Power of Critical Theory* (2005) describes theory as

... nothing more (or less) than a set of explanatory understandings that help us make sense of some aspect of the world... . Theory is eminently practical. Our actions as people... are often based on understandings we hold about how the world works. The more deliberate and intentional an action is, the more likely it is to be theoretical. To this extent theory is inherently teleological; that is, it imbues human actions with purpose (p.3).

From Brookfield's (2005) perspective, theory development is a basic human activity, in which we are constantly creating and refining, in attempts to find what works, and jettisoning theory when it doesn't. Assessing the move toward critical theory,

Brookfield proposes three visions of utility, which can act as evaluative criteria. The first is “if it explains a piece of the world to us”; it is “representational” and runs in the direction of Freire’s notion of perceiving the subject-object of reality more clearly. The second vision is theory that “will prompt social and political change, often of a revolutionary nature...” though it may simply focus on “change for the better”. This dovetails with Freire’s hopes for dialogue, underpinned by the precondition of faith, (belief in other human beings and their desire to engage in the critical work of transformation once they are able to see the possibility) and the construction of theory beyond the limit situation- the untested feasibility. Brookfield’s third vision is theory that empowers, establishing hope in the midst of relentless domination (p. 4-9). Theory that stimulates commitment and the continued movement toward liberation informs the praxis which Freire (2002) names conscientization (*Conscientizacao*) (p. 65-67).

As facilitator my job was to capture the content and meaning of the participant dialogues. But this is not a passive recording; it is an active reading. It is a performance intended to probe and problematized, to push the discussion and thinking in a critical direction, and to dig deeply into the discursive soil of dialogue, finding and nurturing the roots of what might become a growing project. The work of re-focusing dialogue must be done with as much transparency and group participation as possible. Peter McLaren (2000) likened Freire’s facilitation to the movement of a cobra, “moving back and forth and striking quickly when the students’ conditioning was broken down enough so that alternative views could be presented” (p. 151). The process of re-presenting (as in hinged codes), while heavily mediated by the facilitator, cannot be a manipulation for the investigator’s purpose. It cannot be a re-naming, but rather a remembrance, which selectively amplifies the meanings, which stand out in the re-presenters mind.



The role of co-learner may at first glance appear to be a parallel but separate role from the investigator and facilitator; one which implies an egalitarian acquiescence of power. Freire would immediately label this a form of duplicity that has no place in his work. I choose the words co-learner carefully, intending to describe the aspect of this project where the investigator/facilitator participates in the unfolding of the previously unknown. It is also a position that respects the integrity and standpoint of all participants, similar to what Chantal Mouffe (Giroux, 1997, p. 152) describes as the principle of “democratic equivalence”. Looking at the divisive nature of competing interests within a hegemonically imposed limited sum game; Mouffe seeks to create democracies that do not privilege one form of oppression over another. A position that supports democratic equivalence, does not strive to create uniformity, but rather to dislodge the structures of dominance that create an arena of competition, hemming in the interests of people. This stance attempts to create space for the interests of one to become commingled with the interests of many. While Mouffe is referring to the broader world of competing stakeholders such as community based and non-governmental organizations, the line of thinking behind democratic equivalence applies equally well within the relations of a small group.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Participants and Common Interview Themes

This chapter outlines data collected from the pre-interview questionnaire and the first of two interviews that each of the initial 16 participants completed. The *Participants* section includes self-reported descriptions of the subjects, some of which is condensed and compiled as *Demographic Information* and expressed in short narrations and in aggregate tables. Three areas of this descriptive discourse, their view of *Community Connection*, their view of *Political Participation*, and their *Views on Democracy*, generated a substantial amount of discussion and have been expanded upon in this section. The last section in this chapter, *Common Interview Themes*, outlines individual themes and issues held in common among several of the participants. These common themes are ultimately woven together to construct the topics for the group work.

#### *Participants*

Around 40 people inquired about the advertised project that was posted in the local union newspaper. Many people were interested, but were unable to commit to the proposed 12 hours of contact time. The two main barriers to participation that were expressed, were family commitments to children and aging parents, and the relentless pace of a 50 hour work week with the possibility of mandatory Saturdays looming in the near future. There were 16 volunteers, 11 men and 5 women, who agreed to participate in the study and were able to meet for both of the two interview sessions.

#### *Demographic Information*

The demographic data collected in the Pre-Interview Questionnaire and interview sessions were purposely un-refined, seeking the participant's own outlook and perspective (see Appendix B). All of this data emerged from open-ended questions, with

more specific probing in the interviews if questions were left unanswered, the responses were too enigmatic, or unique in some way. All of the participants were given the opportunity to add to, or alter their answers as we reviewed them in the course of their first interview. Some of the more easily condensed data from the questionnaires and interviews are presented in Table 3. Using an alias first name only, the table includes self-reported perceptions from each of the 16 participants. The categories, in order of appearance are, ethnicity and family heritage, race, gender, age (by decade), living configuration/ family structure, the type of community they live in, their educational attainment, current job, and years of service at the plant.

Some comparisons can be made to the data collected prior to the fieldwork, which are presented in Chapter One. I have descriptively inscribed the demarcations of race and gender provided by the Human Resources Department in their 2005 figures (See Table 1) on the project participants to gain a measure of comparison to the makeup of the plant population (see Table 4). Of the 16 participants, there are seven white males, one white woman, four black males, two black women, and two Hispanic women. There is an under representation of white men and white women in the project population. If one were to use the plant wide percentages, in a group of 16, there would be roughly 11 white males and 2 white females.

Table 3.

*Summary of project participant self reported demographic information and quotation reference*

Alias name	(a) Ethnicity – family heritage, (b) Race, (c) Gender, (d) Age (by decade), (e) Living configuration / Family, (f) Community type, (g) Religious affiliation, (h) Education attainment, (i) Current job, (j) Years at Ford.
Barbara	(a) African American, (b) -, (c) Female, (d) 40's, (e) Single, one adult son / Upwardly mobile, intelligent, successful & productive human beings, (f) Southern suburb, (g) Highly spiritual, no church locally, (h) 3 years of college, (i) Pre Delivery Relief, (j) 15.
Bill	(a) German & Yugoslavian, (b) White / European descent, (c) Male, (d) 30's, (e) Married, two teenage boys / Average Americans, (f) Northern Suburb, (g) Lutheran, attends church events, taught Sunday School, (h) BA with some graduate school, (i) Tool Maker, (j) 12.
Brenan	(a) Irish, French, German, US of A, (b) White, (c) M[ale], (d) 40's, (e) Single, (f) Suburban, (g) Active in the Church of Latter Day Saints, involved in mission work, (h) AA Degree, with additional college, (i) Warehouse, Shipping and Receiving, (j) 12.
Brent	(a) American, (b) [White European descent], (c) male, (d) 30's, (e) Wife, cats, dogs, challenges with the older generation, (f) Urban, (g) -, (h) 3 years of college / school always felt like work (i) Quality Inspector (j) 10.
Camilla	(a) Born in Mexico, US citizen, (b) [Hispanic], (c) Female, (d) 40's, (e) Only my husband, kids [teenage] and I, (f) Southeastern suburb, (g) Attends several churches, (h) Grade 5, (i) Forklift Driver, (j) 15.
Demetrius	(a) -, (b) Black, (c) Male, (d) 40's, (e) [Single], (f) Northern Suburb, (g) Open minded, none, (h) HS diploma, Technical college – Army Mechanic (i) Inspector Zone 201, (j) 8
Jack	(a) Croatian / Irish, (b) -, (c) Male, (d) 20's, (e) Married, 1 young child, (f) Rural, (g) None, (h) HS graduate, (i) Mainline Body Build, (j) 8.
Lenny	(a) Hardworking German American, (b) Human being [White European], (c) Male, (d) 60's, (e) Integrated family, somewhat diverse, (f) Urban, (g) None, believe in God, (h) HS diploma, some Technical College, (i) Booth Cleaner, Paint, (j) 37.
Marissa	(a) Swedish descent, (b) White, (c) Female, (d) 40's, (e) Extended, kids, husband, aunts and uncles, (f) Southern suburb, (g) Church volunteer, (h) BA, nearly completing MA, (i) Control Point Body Build, (j) 22.

Table 3. (cont)

Monte	(a) African American, Black, and part Jewish, (b) Black, (c) Male, (d) 30's, (e) Working Class, but Upper Class African American [Single], (f) Urban, (g) None, sometimes television services, (h) HS diploma, 1 year of college, (i) Floor Pan Boxes, Body Build, (j) 5.
Nena	(a) Mexican American, (b) Mexican American, (c) Female, (d) 40's, (e) 2 boys, 2 girls, 1 grandbaby, [Extended] "They're poor, they're nice, they help other people, (f) Southern Suburb, (g) Very involved in church, help with small groups, (h) HS Diploma, liked math, (i) Torque Quality Control Chassis (j) 15
Richard	(a) Scotch, Irish, French, (b) -, (c) Male, (d) 50's (e) Wife, grandkids, close with sisters, (f) Southern suburb, (g) Has in the past, now a Deist, short of an atheist, (h) HS Diploma, good reader in 1 <sup>st</sup> grade, didn't like school after that, (i) On bridge to retirement, last job in pre-delivery, (j) 29.
Rick	(a) Mixed German, American Indian, Southern White Trash, (b) [White European], (c) Male, (d) 40's, (e) Single, (f) Rural, (g) None, (h) HS Diploma, (i) Mainline Body Build, (j) 15.
Teresa	(a) African American with a little German, (b) -, (c) Female, (d) 50's, (e) Married, 4 grown children. Extended growing up, uncles, grandparents, great uncles, (f) Urban, (g) Active in church, Witness, (h) HS Diploma, some college, Bartending School, (i) Quality Control, (j) 7.
Uchembua	(a) African, (US Citizen) (b) -, (c) Male, (d) 50's, (e) Single, fiancé, three grown children, (f) Urban, (g) None, (h) MBA degree, (i) Market Place Coordinator, Warehouse, (j) 16.

Note: the dash marks "—" denote no answer given, the use of brackets [ ] denotes the insertion of the researchers words for clarity.

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Table 4.

*Racial and gender comparison between 2005 assembly plant worker data (see Table 1.) and Study participants.*

Racial Group*	Total	Males in plant	Males in study	Females in plant	Females in study
White	8				
Number		1392	7	258	1
Percent of total		69.53%	43.75%	12.89%	6.25%
Black	6				
Number		179	4	64	2
Percent of total		8.94%	25.00%	3.20%	12.50%
Hispanic	2				
Number		47	0	20	2
Percent of total		2.35%	0.00%	1.00%	12.50%
Asian American	0				
Number		22	0	7	0
Percent of total		1.10%	0.00%	0.35%	0.00%
Native Americans	0				
Number		11	0	2	0
Percent of total		.55%	0.00%	0.10%	0.00%
Column Totals	16	1651	11	351	5
		82.47%	68.75%	17.54%	31.25%

\*Data supplied by Human Resources October, 2006. Demarcations were determined by the company.

African American men are over represented in the study population, as are African American women. There are a total of six people who would be labeled by the company as black in the project population, but relative to the makeup of the plant there would be only three. The two Hispanic women in the study offer the most striking overrepresentation as all non-black minorities including both male and female Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans would add up to only 1 aggregate person out of the participant total of 16. Two of the study participants identified Native American as an

ancestral component, but neither felt this information would have been documented in the company data. As pointed out earlier in Chapter Two, the process of critical dialogue proposed for this project is in and of itself, fairly passive with regard to representation of standpoints that counterpoise hegemonic white male dominance. Because the content of dialogue begins with participant knowledge and experience, as a possible project of counter-hegemony, it is enhanced with a substantial number of voices of “Others”. These serendipitous overrepresentations seemed appropriate given the nature of this project.

Another comparison can be made by examining the level of education attained, as reported by the participants in this study, and as reported by the Human Resources Department in 1999 at the plant, which is outlined in table 2. Table 4 outlines the demarcations from the human resources data collection, and the project participant data has been refined to fit these categories. This data suggests that the project participants on the whole have a considerably higher educational attainment than the plant population in general. The percentages appear extreme in some cases, due in part to the small number of project participants (n. 16). Additionally, the plant statistics were collected when people started their employment with Ford Motor Company. For some, the ensuing years have provided opportunities for further training and academic experiences. In addition, the UAW secured an excellent tuition benefit in the late 1980’s, which some workers have taken advantage of.

Table 5.

*Comparison of Education Level between plant workers and study participants.*

Grade Level Completed	Study Participants	% of Plant Population	% of study Participants	Plant population
Grade 8 or less	1	.1 %	6.25 %	3
1 year of High School	0	1 %	0%	15
2-3 years of high School	0	3.3 %	0%	51
4 years of High School	7	85 %	43.75 %	1304
1 Year of College	2	4.6 %	12.5 %	72
2-3 years of college	3	4.4 %	18.75 %	69
4 years of college	0	.6 %	0	10
Bachelors degree and beyond	3	1 %	18.75 %	14
Total	16	99.9%	100%	1538 *

\* There were 1850 UAW – Ford Employees on the rolls in October 1999 with %17 unaccounted for in this data. Applications from employees transferring from other plants were not available and account for the majority of the 17% difference.

There are, however, some exceptional credentials that have been earned by some of the participants in this study. One person obtained an MBA from a Minnesota State University, two others have college Baccalaureate degrees and some graduate study, and one has an Associate of Arts degree. Credentials of these types are not terribly common,



though I have met one person working at the plant who has obtained a PhD in mathematics and several others who have obtained masters degrees in business and management. I have personally worked with at least 30 UAW members who are near completing a four-year degree, or have graduated and begun some graduate work.

Other commonly cited demographics such as age, partnership status, and the presence of children in the home were also surfaced in the questionnaires and interviews. There is no current aggregate data available which specifies the ages of UAW members, their marital or partner status, or the number and ages of children who might be living at home, so a comparison to the plant population is not possible. The participants range in age by decade, from one person in his 20's to one in his 60's (See Table 3). There are also three people in their 30's, seven in their 40's and four in their 50's. Seven of the participants identified themselves as being single, with nine people currently having partners or spouses living with them. Four participants reported having no children, one person has two young children at home (under five), six people reported living with older (preteen and teenaged) children in their homes, and five reported having had children in their home in the past, but they were now grown and living on their own.

Six of the participants currently live in the urban centers of Saint Paul or Minneapolis; eight live in the surrounding first or second ring suburbs, and two live in rural locations, both in the neighboring state of Wisconsin. Compared to the plant population, this group is considerably more urban (37.5% versus 15%), nearly the same proportions are living in the suburbs (50% to 52% plant wide), and less living in rural areas beyond the suburbs (12% to 33%). All of the participants except two were born and raised in the US. One was born and raised in rural Mexico, and the other in rural Nigeria.

Two of the participants spent tours in the military after high school, both traveling abroad and spending part of their time in Europe.

In terms of religion, the participants represent a wide range of beliefs with 7 people involved in Christian churches, 1 Zen Buddhist, and 8 not affiliated with any religious institutions. The Christian religious institutions include Catholic, Lutheran, Latter Day Saints, and Baptist churches. Two spoke about intermittently watching televangelists. Active participation ranged from occasional volunteer work, teaching Sunday school, and supporting weekly crisis groups. For one participant, activism has meant missionary work (several extended trips over years, though none recently) and for another it has meant weekly outreach “Witnessing” door to door. Six people reported having no affiliation with any particular religious institution, of these, two consider themselves as spiritual or believing in some kind of god, three simply answered “none”, and one person went on to say that he was very suspicious of churches. One participant considers himself a follower of Zen Buddhism.

Ten of the participants consider themselves to be active union members, attending membership meetings, serving on one or more committees, assuming an elected or appointed position, or taking on some form of member advocacy role. Nine out of these ten participants have served on at least one of the many standing UAW local committees and the majority served on more than one. Four people have served on the Community Action Program (CAP) Committee that is the political and legislative arm of the union. This committee works closely with other local unions in lobbying efforts, candidate endorsements, fundraising, and Democratic Farmer Labor Party (DFL) initiatives at the state level. People who have actively participated as members of the CAP Committee often speak of the powerful political awareness, or insight they have gained into the

workings of state and federal politics. Three of the participants are members of the Civil Rights Committee, which is ostensibly a colorblind rights advocacy body, but in reality tends toward encouraging awareness of minority issues within the union and advocacy for minority race and gender grievances. The other committees cited are the Conservation Committee that sponsors environmental awareness programs within the union including an Earth Week celebration, the Women's Committee that works to support women's activism within the local union, and the Elections Committee which oversees and administers the local union elections.

At least two of the participants have aspired to elected office within the union, one having successfully gained a significant part time post, and one having unsuccessfully run for a bargainer position. Several participants mentioned being GROW Representatives, who act as union spokespersons throughout the plant every three years when the national contract is being negotiated. They disseminate contract information, take worker concerns and reactions to the local union leadership and help to prepare the membership for strike readiness should the possibility unfold. A recently developed advocacy opportunity is the Peer Support Group, which was developed in response to the announced closure of the plant. Two of the participants in this study are actively involved in this group, acting as informed advocates to help people access state unemployment, dislocated worker, and federal Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) benefits and retraining funds.

Of the six participants who stated that they were not active in the union, one person was formerly active but currently disillusioned with the union due to perceptions of inadequate representation in several disputes over work rules and job assignments.

One other person expressed some dissatisfaction with the union, but also mentioned positive experiences as well.

The working tenure of the participants at the plant spans more than three decades. Five of the participants have worked at the plant between 5 and 10 years, eight between 11 and 20 years, two between 21 and 30 years and one person for over 37 years. Collectively, these 16 participants have worked in every area of the assembly plant. Five worked in Body Build, a dark and sooty part of the plant where the majority of the body part welding takes place, four people worked in Chassis where the engine components, transmissions, frames and wheels are assembled, three people worked in the Trim Department, the most labor intensive area of the plant, putting on everything from wiring harnesses to mirrors, one person worked in the Paint Department, and two people worked in Pre-Delivery inspecting and making last minute corrections to the outgoing vehicles. One participant worked in both Trim and Chassis as an assembler before obtaining a position as an apprentice Toolmaker. He had completed his training, becoming a Journeyman (a full skilled tradesman) shortly before hearing about the project.

The Pre-Interview Questionnaire (Appendix A) was designed to discover both basic demographic information including, gender, racial and ethnic identity and family structure, employment, educational attainment and religious affiliations as well as more in depth observations, such as perceptions about education, work, involvement in the community, and union activism. The last questions asked about major issues. This format was used as an inquiry framework for the first interview. The more demographically oriented questions like those covered in the previous section were generally asked early in the interview process moving to questions more closely oriented to the concepts around social change as the one on one dialogues progressed. There were questions that

touched upon the participants' prior experiences within their neighborhoods, including their feelings of connection and disconnection to their communities. Another set of questions asked the participants to discuss their involvement in the political process, and to articulate their view of democracy.

### *Community Connection*

Eight of the sixteen participants consider themselves active in their community by knowing and supporting neighbors, through participating in informal neighborhood activities such as block parties, and/or going to meetings organized around local community issues such as crime prevention and land use. Two of these eight are also active in local grassroots politics, helping with precinct caucuses, candidate canvassing support and both are active in antiwar protest marches and union pickets. Of the eight who felt they were not active in their community, most cited the long hours committed to working as the biggest barrier to community participation. Several people spoke about their perceptions that raising children used to bring people in local communities together more, but now, kids activities take them out of their local communities and require considerable parental time commitments.

Half of the volunteer participants spoke about feeling connected and active in their neighborhoods. Several people like Lenny described being a part of informal neighborhood organizations that coalesce around social events such as block parties. Lenny is white and in his 60's, and quite outspoken about his feelings of connection:

We get together once a year, they usually block off the alley and have an alley party. You get to meet your new neighbors and have a beer and just have a good time. You get to compare notes and see what everybody does for a living, see what somebody's doing here.

Several people also talked about getting involved in their communities in reaction to local problems. Teresa is an African American in her 50's with grown children. She is very outgoing, and spoke openly about her changing attitudes toward diversity in her community. She remembers vividly moving into a new neighborhood with her young children as a single parent:

...At night... on all four corners, they'd be gambling on one corner, and smokin' drugs and selling drugs on another corner. The prostitutes, they would just do whatever they wanted to do. ...I just got tired of it. My kids couldn't go out and play, and I was frustrated to the point where I was calling the police consistently, and getting to know the police helped. They knew a lot of the people that they would come and get.... Once I started working [with the community] in that area, working with the police... then I began to understand the neighborhood. Then I began to understand the people... You had a mixture of all ethnics, there were blacks, there were whites, there were Hmong, there were Chinese, they had it all. And as long as everybody talked to each other they got along. It was when they didn't talk, that they didn't get along because of assumptions made of each other without knowing of each other.

Some people arrive in communities that have well-established organizations that not only support social activities, but also can quickly mobilize resistance to perceived adverse developments. Bill white and in his 30's lives in the suburban neighborhood in which he grew up, moving back to it with his young family about eight years ago. He remembers having very little sense of community growing up, but becoming involved as an adult when a large retailer was developing some formerly wooded lots near his home:

Where I live now we have a good association.... I've gotten to know a lot of people. There's garage sales every year, they do ice cream socials. People kind of know what's going on with other people ... A lot of people there, their parents grew up in the neighborhood. Some people are still original homeowners, so it feels like a 50s or 60s style community.... We are really close knit. And if someone feels threatened and really had a beef well everybody in our little neighborhood stood up... to give those who were going to be affected a larger voice.

Other people spoke about businesses that anchor and encourage community, such as bars and coffee shops. Rick is white, single and in his 40's living on several acres in a rural community, with only one neighbor visible down the road:

... In an effort to not become too much of a hermit, and get out of the house, that's actually what the function of the coffee house is for me. It's a great place to keep in contact with people without having to call them to say hey I haven't seen you in a while. Because almost everybody who I associate with shows up in that coffee shop on either Saturday or Sunday morning. ... I'm sure that a few generations ago that's the same type of thing at the local granary or whatever, everybody would gather for a cup of coffee and figure out what the heck to do when something goes wrong.

Some of those who expressed disconnection with their neighbors, are still able to find some sense of connectedness within church communities that bring together people from broader geographic locations. Nena is Mexican American, in her 50's with grown children, and speaks with passion about her participation in outreach and support groups that her church sponsors. "...I do a lot of volunteer work, I go to those little classes ...you know like if people needed help with drinking, or drugs, or personal stuff. I'm always there..." Her unwavering solidarity with her church is somewhat surprising, given that when she was fired from her job several years ago, this same church did not help. She feels that she is free to give, but doesn't have power to direct the church community in any meaningful way:

...But I don't have a say in it and I wish I would have a say in it because a couple of years ago I lost my job and I was hurting like that. I called on my church to help me and they never did and I was kind of upset about that. But I got over it.

Whether their experiences run across church based communities, growing up within well connected extended families, solidarity in work communities, or neighborhood associations, even those who feel very disassociated from their neighbors seem to have been a part of meaningful communities at some point in their lives.

### *Community Disconnectedness*

Monte, an intensely engaging and gregarious African American man in his 30's suggested solemnly that he was not only inactive in his neighborhood, but that he lived like a visitor, coming and going but only engaging on the surface. "I am a tourist in my neighborhood... I see what is going on, an observer, but I'm not involved." As an urban apartment dweller in Saint Paul, he has had a few opportunities to engage with his neighbors, such as a National Night Out block club gathering down the street a couple of years ago, but no subsequent gatherings have been organized. The after hours night club activity in his neighborhood which has included some violence and police intervention has also spurred some community meetings, but Monte feels that nothing has come out of the meetings. Similar feelings of disconnection were expressed by nearly half of the participants in the study.

Jack, white and a new father in his twenties, is very independent minded, and seems to have grown more distant from his neighbors in his rural town as time goes on. He has had disagreements with neighbors on either side of his rented house, and with the landlord. He summed up his community this way:

Your basic small-town Main Street. You have your eight bars, you're one florist, you got your pharmacy.... three churches.... You know a couple of the bars, well one of the bars I guess, is a place you go when you want to see a familiar face. Other than that I really could care less about the town itself. I don't love the town, nothing like that.

Demetrius, African American and a suburban apartment dweller in his 40's living near Minneapolis suggested that it has been easier to get to know several of the active neighbors in the community than people in his own apartment building:

It's a funny thing, in my apartment, as soon as you open up the door... when you go in, they'll wait until you go all the way out the door before they come out in the hallway. Nobody wants to be seen....



Several people suggested that shifting cultural elements were driving the disconnection they felt. There is a perception that people are working more than in the past, and that the process of raising children is having less of a neighborhood building effect as children and parents spend increasing amounts of time driving to other communities to participate in specific activities. Uchembua, in his 50's, has been a member of a UAW political committee for many years and speaks eloquently about the need for labor to engage with community members to build support for common interests. With a resigned, almost tired pragmatism, he captures the effect of the 50-hour workweek on his community disconnectedness this way. "I know my neighbors, not too many of them. ... I talk to them, but I don't really participate very actively in what is going on in the community because I'm not around."

Richard, white and also in his 50's remembers being exhausted as he left work, without any capacity to do anything but go home and sleep. He sees the same pattern being played out by his neighbors:

And a lot of what I think stops having more intimacy with neighbors is everybody's so dog gone busy making a living now. ... trying to bring up their kids and everything else. And everybody just works ungodly long hours.... there's no more eight hour day or weekends or Sunday's off.... really, I think it's really more than just the whole suburb ethos, it's just the constant work everybody's doing.

Brenan, white and in his 40's, reflecting on his childhood, remembers a much more cohesive community. Living alone in his basement apartment, he suggests:

With us growing up, you knew the kids that lived next to you because everybody was the same age. I think that's how parents actually made friends was by the kids making friends with the kids and with your neighbor people. I don't see that very much.

Camilla has two teenaged children, one involved in year-round association hockey. She feels the pressure of driving and spending long hours at hockey rinks for

practices, games and tournaments. She also expresses a desire for privacy, which adds another dimension to the barriers impeding community building she experiences in her suburban community:

On my block ... it's like everyone doing their own thing... We say hi and bye, how you doing if we pass. But like getting involved in their lives, I don't like to do that...I'm not interested in knowing what's going on in their house... everybody has kids and everybody's too busy to do that.

### *Political Participation*

For many of the participants, perceptions surrounding political engagement are shaded and contoured by their perceptions of democracy. The data generated from these two related topics are intertwined and not easily unwoven. Indeed, conversations about participation often projected articulations of democracy, while defining democracy often folded back into dialogue concerning political participation. One way to examine these data is to think about political participation as an action on the part of the individual, and to look at systemic opinions, and observations about how other people act within systems of power as informing views on democracy.

The participants in this study varied in both their perceptions of their political participation, and their activism. Everyone spoke about voting, and all claimed to participate in the franchise regularly. Barbara, African American in her 40's, senses a disconnection between voting and political participation. "I think I have nonparticipation. I have opinions... because I've not done anything but vote." Monte suggests that voting is a sort of minimum duty: "Well, let's just say for the record, that I hold to the social contract. I vote, I observe most of the laws..."

Most of the participants spoke of being earnestly interested in finding out about candidates. Bill's research process is informed by his own interests, the activism of family members, and appears to be shaded by bread and butter labor issues:

... I'm going to try to find out as much as I can about them and make calls to campaign headquarters and talk to people about what does your candidate stand for. Even, I've asked what kind of a car does a person drive, do they support American-made products. ...Is he good for the State? I have a brother that's very politically active... and he calls me up and sometimes we agree and sometimes we don't, but we talk quite a bit about what's going on.

A few people spoke about the difficulty in being an informed voter. Marissa, who is active in local union politics, admits "When I go to the polls I often find myself going oops, who are those judges?" Uchembua suggests that not paying attention to judges is not only a common problem, but it is dangerous as well. "Nobody says anything about judges around my area. And this is important because they decide a lot of things. You know you go to court and they're there to hang you, or... to let you go free. Nobody knows."

More than half of the participants suggested that they engage politically in other ways as well. Several people spoke about growing up in families that were active politically. Hamilton, who is very active in local and union politics, describes his indoctrination into activism this way:

... My first political experience was at four years old chalking sidewalks with my parents following behind to register for votes. [8 years later] in 1964 at the Democratic national convention that was held in Atlantic City, my father was a delegate and I was a page and messenger person... All the time before, they were all white delegations, but the freedom delegation from Mississippi got a bus and got to Atlantic City. ... My father, who was working with Governor Pat Brown and Humphrey from Minnesota here, collected delegate badges from delegates sitting on the floor. And I was a page and messenger boy and they gave them to me. I put them in my pouch, I took them outside and I distributed them to the freedom Mississippi delegation.... as they weren't registered delegates. So that's how they got on the floor of the convention and that's when the big floor fight [happened].

As mentioned earlier, about one in four of the participants have been active members of the local CAP (Community Action Program) Committee. Though Teresa grew up in a politically active family, as a young girl accompanying her mother to rallies for Dr. Martin Luther King, Elijah Mohamed, and Malcolm X among others, she gained important knowledge about political process as an adult participant in the union:

... Until I got on the CAP Committee and I got a chance to meet people, and got a chance to see the processes of how these things go from the stages. How they start from the ground and work their way up. I appreciate that lesson big-time.... the CAP Committee had a huge impact on my life as far as the political process.

Some of the participants prefer to focus on neighborhood projects. Brent lives in a progressive part of South Minneapolis, and has found many opportunities to participate locally:

When I first moved into my house in the neighborhood, a year later, I ended up doing the neighborhood Board of Directors for about 18 months. And right now for the last 4 1/2 to five years I've been involved with the Midtown Farmers Market on the advisory board for that. And that's actually been keeping me pretty busy... Generally, if there's a politician I believe in, the first thing I'll do is stick a lawn sign out, and the second thing I'll do is sometimes going [to] help. Depending on how important I think that spot is.... I can make phone calls, I can cook for the troops.... I prefer to help out more local, neighborhood, State Rep. City Council members....

Other participants, like Richard, participate in broader national movements, but work at them in a grassroots fashion:

I try to go to different rallies, like labor demonstrations or antiwar demonstrations. I try to be fairly active in that. I think it's important to be out in the streets... it's important to have your body out there. I don't do a lot of the hard ground work by going and talking to people, that kind of thing. Because at this point I think I'm a little too lazy to do it. I try to do what I can, what I'm comfortable with.

### *Views on Democracy*

Most of the views on democracy were developed around the tension between the potential of a good form of governance, and the ways in which it is compromised in practice. Most people chose to jump back and forth across the chasm between their ideal vision and what they actually perceive today, offering few prescriptions. For many, one of the promises of democracy is that through fair representation, everyone will prosper, including those whose interests are in the minority. Lenny grew up in a working class home on the Iron Range in northern Minnesota, and considers himself working class to this day. He is the eldest of the participants and feels deeply that the fundamental elements of the perceived meritocracy he grew up with are still alive:

Democracy to me, means all people should get a fair shake... I was brought up in a strict German family. Hence the work ethic... To me, you should be treated as a good human being.... You work hard and you do right and you try to do the right thing, you should be treated that way. I don't care what nationality you are or whatever, that's what you should get.

This view is shared by many in this group of Autoworkers. Marissa's hope is that "Democracy should be decisions made with the public's best interest in mind." Rick positions this promise more remotely, but just as essentially:

What I would ideally hope for in that utopian society is that the majority of people would have that mindset that we look out for everybody. And everybody should get a fair shake, so if there is a minority faction, whether that be Hmong people moving in, that we vote as a society to be supportive to put programs in place to help... And that certainly is a utopian mindset that the majority of people will want to work for the common good. I don't really see that happening, but I can't think of a better way to have a society formed and stay stable. Democracies don't have a very good track record in human history. We are still young, maybe it's just a pipe dream. But I still hold onto that pipe dream.

Several people placed the hope of democracy in amongst other forms of governing, illuminating a more global view. Growing up in Africa, Uchembua has a unique historical perspective:

Democracy ..., the way it's stated, is good. It's not practiced. Nobody practices democracy, nobody. It's a good form of government. Any kind of government can be good.... there are countries that need dictators. If they can get a dictator that is interested in the people, not one that wants to take everything.... and there are some. You may not agree with me. Cuba is one of them. Fidel Castro worked for his people. Muammar Qaddafi, if you knew about Libya before him, they were nothing. He brought them to where they are now. They needed him. Rawlings in Ghana put the country back out to where [Kufour] won it. And now Ghana has something... they are way better off than they would have been without him taking over. ... If you can get somebody to right the ship and then bring in democracy, yes. ... For me,... if you're governing you have to look out for everybody, not just you, not just your family. It's everybody. You have to respect everybody. If democracy is going to work, it has to work out of respect. ...

Richard feels that human rights dictate that everyone should have “three hots and a cot”, pointing to food and decent housing. He feels the promise of democracy remains unfulfilled:

... I don't believe we have it right now. You're given a few choices, but that's not democracy. I think it's a majority of people deciding what issues are important and how they want to deal with them. It sure [helps] to bring the proper issues, ... [those] that are important to... people's actual lives or physical lives, to the forefront. That's a real trick, and actually it seems to be easily derailed here in my opinion. I don't think we have it because it's very easily co-opted. I don't know how you'd really ...get it... I think it's as elusive as anarchy, where everybody does the right thing just because that's the natural way to do it. ... I think it's basically people deciding how to lead decent lives. Everybody gets along.

Richard's sense that people in this country are easily distracted from issues that directly effect their lives, to ones shaped by those in power are echoed by many.

Hamilton sees this manipulation as a challenge of political marketing:

I hate seeing someone with a beat up rusted out old vehicle with a bumper sticker [saying] vote Republican. How can they ever feel that the Republican Party has their best interests? What the Democrats need to do is take the

marketing department that the Republicans have, and do it. Because they have it down. People think Republican, they think lower taxes. They don't think lower services because that's what you get with lower taxes.

One way Hamilton attempts to overcome this and other challenges to democracy is to focus on grassroots work:

What I try to do is make politics personal. If you make it personal with your neighbors, what is your issue, what are your concerns? ... Show them how they can build a base with like-minded people that have the same concern and issue as them. Then that's the only way we can offset the balance and the power of money is through the masses of the people being active.... people don't recognize how precious the vote is.

Monte also believes that democracy should start at the grassroots level:

... well, there's the real democracy, and then there's the paper democracy. ... I think that democracy should be, you know the whole 'for the people by the people'. It's supposed to be representative ... everyone from a farmer in the Midwest to a schoolteacher in California should have the same voice. So real democracy starts at the grassroots level and it goes all the way up until the lawmakers.... If you can't get people mobilized in a community, you know if you can't get them together for a problem that they have in the community, they'll never get together on something more global.

Monte draws this discussion back to the current state of the economy and work.

“However, I think as Americans were just not interested, but if you have to go to work [at] two jobs, pay a lot of bills, it's really hard to mobilize against anything.”

Like several others, he feels that the system we live under is the best in the world, but “... I think however it's been corrupted. And it's been so corrupted that we hear about the corruption over and over again and we have notoriously short memories as Americans and ... we've become desensitized to it.” Monte weaves together a critique that threads an economic strand into Hamilton's argument about being distracted from important issues. Monte continues:

What we have is essentially a system that really ... represents ... big business, corporations and whoever's got the most money to throw around. Our politicians are pretty much... I'm trying to think of a euphemism for

prostitution.... I really think that this system is being whored out.... it really does us all a grave injustice. Just from what I've seen over the past couple of years, they keep telling us that terrorism and bird flu, chickens coughing, that these are the real threats to our democracy, or to our civilization. But really, ... the real threat to our civilization is corruption.

Corruption was one of the most pervasive critiques of the current U.S.

government. Camilla's awareness of the patterns of power in this country seems to be informed by what she experienced in her youth in Mexico:

In Mexico poor people ... don't have the power ... or maybe were afraid to compete with the big people and sometimes therefore we lose. Sometimes we have a poor percent of democracy because we like give up, we don't have like the energy, to keep going to not give up so easy....

Referring to the U.S. she simply puts it that "... no matter how much we vote, always gonna win the ones who have the money. For some reason, I don't know what it is."

Expanding on the element of economic corruption as it relates to voice, Demetrius places the onus on multinational corporations and media consolidation:

Well, voice is... whoever's got the biggest wallet. The media, they haven't been the same since 70, maybe 78 that's the last time they had some backbone.... Once these corporations started buying them up, they shut them down. ....Corporations like Ford, they feel that they can just hush people up. They can bring in high hitters and lawyers and doubletalk and build up walls and whatever they decide they want to do. Drown out the little man. And the voice is paid for.... they've got... mercenaries, people from out of town.

Teresa wraps the idea of power around access to political office, and the flagrant use of unregulated authority:

You don't have common people running for political office. ...There was a time when you had your community activism and your community leaders... running for these positions.... It's no longer about the people anymore. It's simply about... who's going to get the power. That's it... A perfect example is going on with [President] Bush right now. Anytime you have a power that can be expendable from any wrongdoing, that's too much power. For one person or one entity to have, over a whole nation, are you kidding me? You know the last person to have that kind of power was Edgar J. Hoover. ...



Brenan suggests that there are long term effects from such a power arrangement:

I can see our democracy being chipped away at easily by the laws that have been recently formed.... hopefully... people will realize that their liberties are being taken away so they'll start voting in a way that they'll be represented by people who will keep our liberties and not try to take them away.

These views on corruption were not the only critique put forth by participants.

Richard feels that in a move from dictatorship to free elections, people sense a change, but it always seems limited by the economic situation. Lenny feels that current problems in the White House are a result of a limited choice brought on by the two party system. “I consider myself neither a conservative nor a liberal. I have lots of friends who are either Republican or Democrat and that's all they see. You’ve known me for a while; I'm not satisfied with the two-party system. I'm not.”

Brent sees Democracy as an almost painfully slow process at the local level and yet he continues to be committed to working at this level:

Well, being in all these boards...I'd say it's a long process of decision-making. Everybody gets a chance to vote, there is a rule of order, how stuff is generally presented and sometimes it takes way too long and I wonder if it's worth it. ...Everything is about one year, from the start of the project, to try to push it through to the end for what you hopefully accomplished.... even something in a small scale... Nothing ever happens in a large scale, it seems like.

He adds, however, that even at the local level power seems to be shifting. “... You know every day I feel like businesses is taking a bigger part of the whole thing.”

A few of the participants echoed Hamilton’s view that voters underutilize their potential power as citizens. Teresa points out that many people don’t know or don’t seem to care about participating in democracy until they find themselves in crisis:

A lot of people don't know... they have the right to talk to [State Legislators]. And they choose not to. They choose ... not having anything to do with them.... unless they were coming to bulldoze or put a hole in their house, or tear up their street. Then they wanna know why.

Brenan feels that voters are dysfunctional, displaying an almost mystical lack of continuity:

I think people shoot themselves in the foot every time they vote for a person.... I don't see how Minnesota voted Democratic across-the-board except for the Governor. I don't understand that. And then they all complain and I say you voted for this guy. And I don't know how that actually happens.... It's like a strange force that does that.

Jack feels that the U.S. government is bloated and that people are taxed and regulated far too much. His vision was atypically conservative, looking back nostalgically to the constitutional principles of the countries founding:

...personally I think a democracy should be what our forefathers wanted it to be. The land of the free, a land...have a gun, to buy land, to do what you want with it. And not have to worry about getting taxed on everything you do. You make money you're taxed, you spend money you're taxed, you save money you're taxed. And the government just wants to keep on taking our money, and taking our money. And if we could just keep it in our hands, we could do a lot more with this country than what were doing with it now. I personally feel were going down hill, and pretty fast too.

The views on democracy and political participation reveal an undercurrent of discontent with the current system of governance in the U.S. Issues surrounding a disconnection between representatives and those being represented, the influence of money and business backed power in the shaping and controlling of political discourse, corruption going unchallenged, and voter ambivalence all dampen the hope most of these participants hold out for democracy. These currents connect in many ways to the issues and themes articulated in the last three questions of the pre-interview questionnaire.

#### *Common Interview Themes*

In the last section, the shared themes were developed from answers that were prompted by specific questions about political participation and so on. The Pre-interview questionnaire, and usually the interviews as well, concluded with three open ended

questions asking the participants to share their opinions about the most important issues facing their community, their regions or country, and the world as a whole. In the interviews, these questions were prefaced with an explanation, that the participants could choose any framework in which to develop their key issues, and that the structure of moving from local to global was merely a prompt to stimulate thinking. The goal of this part of the interview was to broaden the range of themes discussed, and to see which ones might be held in common. The common themes that surfaced include (a) universal healthcare, (b) taxes, (c) the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, (d) immigration, (e) global warming, and (f) education.

### *Universal Healthcare*

Almost everyone spoke up about the need for some type of health care reform. For many, the issues centered on rising costs and the growing inability for many to access affordable health services. Some see it hitting children and senior citizens most directly, while others framed the problem as an erosion of the middle class, where people have to make choices about whether to seek medical attention and perhaps to defer paying some essential monthly bill.

Many people reflected on their own healthcare benefit packages as autoworkers with a mixed sense of relief and foreboding. With nearly all healthcare costs covered under the UAW contract, including retirement supplements to Medicare and Medicaid and disability insurance, they are well aware of their unique position in the current economic environment. Several people spoke about recent, widely published, news reports blaming company-subsidized healthcare and pension benefits for the current troubles in the domestic automotive industry. Seeing the escalating costs of healthcare born by workers in other industries and professions and with the plant closing looming on

the horizon, there is a sense that they are witnessing an end of an era for working Americans.

In response to the problem of rising costs and inadequate access to healthcare, two threads of thinking emerged. These participants generally agreed that access to health care should be thought of as a basic human right, and that it will take federal government intervention to initiate and manage successful change. Lenny summed up the human rights aspect this way:

When you're sick ... you should be able to go to the doctor and be treated.... I don't care what nationality or what color your skin... I don't think the hospitals should have the right ...they basically tell you no. It isn't right because you're still a human being. So what if you happen to be down and out and whatever but you should be able to get health care. ... you should be taken care of. .... I think they need a complete overhaul.

There were several different reasons why people suggested the need for federal government intervention in this healthcare crisis. Some felt that the current system of business-subsidized health plans has hurt companies' competitiveness in a global marketplace. Most of the participants felt that the current gaps in coverage clearly run along economic lines, and the only way to bridge the coverage between rich and poor would be for the federal government to manage the system somehow. Some suggested the U.S. should adopt models of healthcare ranging from Canada's system to Cuba's. Frequently people suggested that poorer countries around the world often had better basic healthcare than the U.S. An undercurrent of this notion tied back into discussions about government corruption and corporate profiteering. Barbara articulated this link when she brought up the power of the drug manufacturing industry in this country:

... You know the corporations ... look at the cost of medicine, you know, they want to keep it high, so they try to put people in Congress to vote against a lot of policies ... It's the corporation that's winning and not the people.... and it's all politics basically, it's all politics to me...

### *Taxes*

About half of the participants brought up issues surrounding taxes in the interviews. There was only one person who complained directly about being taxed too much, while almost everyone pointed out that the system of collection didn't seem to be fair. The main objections to the current system were that it is far too complex and riddled with loopholes which help the wealthy evade paying what they should.

Four people spoke in favor of flat rate taxation, where everyone pays the same rate on income. When asked about the potentially regressive nature of such a tax, the responses didn't suggest that this was a way of unfairly collecting a disproportionate amount of money from poor people, but rather that it would be a way to collect more from those who are well off economically. The support for a flat tax seemed to deal more with simplifying the tax code, and making taxation more transparent and equitable across economic lines, a move perceived as more progressive than regressive.

### *The Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*

The U.S. military action in Iraq and Afghanistan, "The War" surfaced as a major theme in every interview and was universally condemned as a failure by these participants. As with other major themes, each participant had their own unique way of framing their view, coming at their critique from many different directions. One of the most common threads in these critiques was woven around the perception of being deceived about the justifications for the war, such as Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, that war would bring freedom and democracy to these regions, and that these actions were really protecting U.S. freedom.

Several people brought up the impact of the war on the U.S. national debt, and how it is and will affect our ability to deal with domestic problems such as poverty and

rising unemployment. Others built arguments around the unjustifiable human costs of these military actions. Several people spoke about the substantial mobilization of the National Guard, which they see as taking a heavy toll on working families. Several people also discussed their perception that recruiting practices unjustly target the poor. Three people brought up concerns that the draft could very well be re-instated, effecting their own families, young people in general, and recreating still more of the patterns that failed during the Vietnam era. Several people spoke about the human loss to U.S. troops, while others pointed to the unjustifiable losses on all sides. One person, Barbara, questioned why the U.S. would invade Iraq, when regions like Darfur (Sudan) were undergoing genocide, and in desperate need of intervention.

### *Immigration*

Ten of the sixteen participants discussed their wide ranging views on the impact of undocumented workers, immigration law and the movement of people across the borders of the U.S. Individuals had mixed feelings about undocumented workers breaking laws by illegal entry but then being uprooted and deported after many years, as well as the impact of both documented and undocumented workers within the changing economic and cultural landscape of the U.S.

Brenan felt that laws should be obeyed, but in the case of immigration, he asked if the law has been fair and just. He sees an unfair system symbolized by the fences along the boarder with Mexico in contrast to the relatively open access with Canada. Lenny makes no suggestion that immigration laws should be changed, however he feels that if people are able to get here, and make a life here, they should be able to stay. He is very upset with the construction of “the wall” being constructed on certain stretches of the boarder between several southern states and Mexico.

Jack felt that services were being depleted by people coming across the Mexican border, particularly welfare subsidies and healthcare services, though he can understand wanting to come to the U.S. for a better life. His culminating argument against illegal immigration centered however, on his fear that terrorist organizations would use a porous border to infiltrate the U.S. and carry out violence.

When speaking directly about immigration, Bill believes people who come here to work are not a problem. He empathizes with families caught in the horrible web of violence in Somalia and feels that they should be allowed to come to safety. He is concerned however, about what he sees as an erosion of U.S. patriotism with the movement toward celebrating multiculturalism in his suburban school district. Camilla, an immigrant herself, feels that illegal immigration should stop in large part because of its impact on lowering wages and in competition for a shrinking pool of living wage jobs. She perceives that the major problem for the U.S. is not undocumented workers, but rather companies who move their production across borders. She is in favor of penalizing companies who take work elsewhere, and supporting those companies who stay and provide jobs. Barbara's economic critique centered on the fact that migrant farming and many service jobs being performed by undocumented workers simply do not pay a living wage. She contends that if the employers paid competitive wages, U.S. workers would fill the jobs. She feels that the current administration in Washington supports illegal immigration as long as it keeps wages low.

Teresa, who is one of six African Americans in the group of participants, had many issues with people new to the U.S. She perceives that the institutional discrimination she feels every day is not passed on to new immigrants. Upset by having to wait over a month for a criminal background check to be returned, she feels this

doesn't happen to immigrants. She feels the sting of the apartheid her family has experienced for generations where traditions and lifeways survived only in secret, while newly arrived immigrants can freely practice their religion, and look and act as differently as they please. She is upset when she hears new arrivals suggest that there is so much free opportunity in this country to take advantage of, while she feels that for her there is always a cost and nothing is for free. She also feels that local businesses owned by people who have come from countries like Laos or Somalia do not employ local neighborhood people. This view was also shared by Demetrius who sees the influx of Hispanic owned restaurants and grocers along Lake Street in Minneapolis, hiring only Hispanic workers and not helping the broader communities that surround these businesses.

### *Global Warming*

Eight people brought up global warming as a major issue, and at first glance it seems to be a very polarizing subject. Jack felt the concept was a "farce" and we are still warming from coming out of the last ice age, Bill held that it was unproven, but felt that we are on a trajectory to "kill the planet". Lenny and Franklin felt that the process was so well underway that governments need to be much more involved in this immediate crisis. The terrain in between these two margins brought out a great deal of cynicism around the concept of global warming and the green movement. Monte feels that the project of global warming is being used as a distraction to keep us from paying attention to the corruption that is going on in Washington. Teresa feels that convincing information about this problem has been around for several decades, but now it has become fashionable and it is supplanting more local, community based movement:



Right now, the only thing you have people standing for anymore is the greenhouse effect. Give me a break. I remember when I was in high school they were talking about the greenhouse effect ... Now all of a sudden everybody wants to make this mad rush because they decided in their middle ages to have ... children, that they want everything to be green.

These manifestations of cynicism around the topic of global warming were somewhat surprising to me, given that almost all of the people who brought it up were genuinely concerned about changes occurring around the planet. Reflecting on this, I am unsure of any particular causality. Speculating, I wonder whether the automotive industry's deliberate resistance to protocols and regulations on emissions may have had some influence on these autoworkers. Perhaps there are broader issues facing these frontline consumers who may see increased environmental costs depleting their already shrinking disposable income.

### *Education*

The Pre-interview questionnaire contained items asking about participant experiences in school, both positive and negative. The main purpose of these questions was to explore for trends in prior experience that might have an impact on the popular education process proposed in this project. There has been an assumption held by many in adult education that industrial workers in general and autoworker assemblers in particular, disliked school and represent a concentration of people who have floundered in the formal K-12 system. This sentiment did not appear to be supported by the data collected, and though three out of the 16 participants clearly considered themselves to have been uninspired students, all three completed high school and have engaged in extensive training programs through the military, community boards, unions, and various on the job skills programs. Individuals discussed different forms of prejudice they had

endured, feelings of alienation by clicks and peer pressure, and having important relationships with teachers.

Collectively, three major educational themes surfaced, the view that programs are being severely affected by cuts, that schools are becoming more segregated along class lines, and a perception that there has been a shift away from developing critical thinking in most schools. The view that school programming is being compromised is widely held by these participants. Most of the blame is directed toward current climate of conservative politics, though some critiques are more detailed. A few people spoke harshly about the effects of federal No Child Left Behind legislation. Franklin spoke of the impact of un-funded mandates that have created a battle for resources between gifted and talented enrichment programs and special needs education. Bill feels that the schools have more money than ever, and it is through inefficiency that his suburban school district is facing cuts in arts programming which have been some of the most important options for his kids.

Monte feels that there is a trend away from critical thinking in education. He suggests that most people are simply being trained to get a job and pay taxes, while the children of the wealthy are the few who are being educated to think. Rick points out that there is a transformative possibility for people in poverty that is being lost as educational systems become more and more compromised. Marissa has experienced a form of condescension in some of her college business classes. "... Young people were being trained to not think of [workers] as entities, just as tools to profit corporate America. This was in an educational setting..."

The common themes and major issues that resonate with these autoworkers converge in several critical areas. On certain levels, some of these areas of confluence

emanate confused and mixed messages. On the topic of immigration for example, many people expressed the feeling that the flow of undocumented workers is a mounting threat to living wage jobs. For a few, the racial tension is palpable. Others view the process from the safety of what is legal and what is not. But this distinction becomes confused when people without documents find a way to stay in the U.S. and make a life. When the line between us and other is unclear, empathy can override legality. Still others see both legal and illegal immigration as a human rights issue, and seem to have an understanding of what drives people to risk their lives in border crossings. Threads of globalization and corporate exploitation are also woven into many of these perceptions around the theme of immigration but these critiques don't seem to provide much clarity or possible directions for change. Discontent with the current regime in power in the U.S. was a common theme that had broad support among these participants. There were many lenses focused on this issue including corruption, economic unfairness, and warmongering. There was much more unanimity within this theme than with immigration, though each person had their own unique set of perceptions.

Stepping to a broader level, there seemed to be a possibility to incorporate many of these confluences into a generative theme that offered the potential for a great number of project options. This theme became the topic of one project group, *The Loss of the Middle Class*. Another way to examine the breadth of these thematic convergences is to view some or all of the effects on a vulnerable group. Children came up throughout these discussions as a bell weather group, vulnerable to the economic and social pressures we face today. The other generative theme to be tackled by the second group is *Raising Children: from a community perspective*.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Generative Themes and Participant Codes

#### *Generative Themes*

Information from the Pre-interview Questionnaires and the initial interviews themselves exposed a broad range of topics and opinions developed out of the participants' memories, and current understandings of issues that relate to their lives. To move from this individualized aspect of the project toward a shared understanding in the context of the group work, required several decisions to be made. As mentioned in Chapter One, the practice of coding often entails a process of fracturing the continuity of spoken words in order to reconstruct meaning that connects to and informs the researcher's questions. This project was designed with participant voice at the forefront, requiring a markedly different approach to thematic development.

Paulo Freire (2002) used the term generative theme to describe a set of ideas in the form of a theme that would stimulate the articulation of yet more themes in the context of group dialogue (p.102). Working from interview segments such as those presented in Chapter Three, the hope was to find at least two themes that were shared in some form among five or more participants. As it happened, two currents of thought emerged that were shared by all participants in varying ways. One of these currents I have called the *Loss of the Middle Class*, and the other is *Raising Children: from a community perspective*. After transcribing each of the first interviews and then consolidating themes shared by several participants, the coding process took the shape of exposing the different lines of thought which informed each participant's perspective on a particular theme or issue. In pulling together the perspectives for these two main generative themes, the focus was to touch upon not just the most prevalent viewpoints,

but also to re-present participant ideas that stretched and pushed these themes adding more layers and broadening the possibilities for discussion.

After these two generative themes emerged and the various perspectives were accumulated, a synopsis page was developed to use in the second interviews, to quickly present in a broad brush stroke, the various thoughts of the 16 participants. Once the membership of each of the two groups was determined, a decision was made to leave the summary page in its broad form, making sure that the ideas of each member of the group were reflected amidst the various statements on the specific summary page. The short statements on the synopsis page were in the researcher's words, and were developed as talking points. They were also used in the second interviews as a form of checklist, to make sure that the ideas and stories behind each statement were re-presented to each of the particular group participants.

The quotes in the next two sections have been limited to those of the people who actually participated in each of the two groups. The decisions surrounding group membership are covered in the next chapter *Group Work*, but the names of those participating appears at the beginning of the next two sections.

#### *Loss of the Middle Class*

The summary sheet for the *Loss of the Middle Class* included 15 statements representing the various coded perspectives suggested collectively by the whole group (see Table 6). Membership in this group included *Barbara, Brennan, Demetrius, Monte, Richard and Rick*.

**Table 6 Loss of the Middle Class themes:**

*People aren't paying attention to the declining job market*

*There is a growing wealthy- poor divide*

*Wages are falling and not getting ahead*

*Positioning cheap labor against living wage jobs*

*Corporations pitting worker against worker*

*Loss of neighborhood work tied to racism*

*Inability to find income replacing work*

*Markets being destroyed*

*Paying living wages for consumption*

*Helplessness- leading to crime*

*Costs going up for housing, gas, food*

*More aware of people on street corners asking for money*

*Loss of funding for schools, parks, etc...*

*Management responsibility for troubled industries*

*People aren't paying attention to the declining job market.*

Several participants spoke about how people in the U.S. seem to be numb to the continuous string of layoffs in major industries around the country. The way in which the loss of jobs is experienced by these autoworkers seems to hinge on whether or not they have some form of personal familiarity with joblessness. Beyond reflective moments of empathy, most of the participants turned their gaze back to their own ongoing employment or retirement with a mixture of relief, a sense of luck and or entitlement.

The concept that all people should have access to living wage jobs was pervasive. Some people amended the concept of universal living wages with the notion that jobs should be there for everyone who is willing to work.

Some of the reasons given as to why people are not paying attention, varied from intentional distractions such as war and fear (stemming from the War on Terrorism set off by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001), and indirectly from pressure to be relentless consumers. Some, including Monte suggested that good paying jobs tend to make people comfortable and there are consequences to this:

And I think it's more than just the loss of youthful enthusiasm.... If I have a job to go to and it's pretty decent money then I'm going to tend to be a little more complacent. You know I'm more interested in going to plays than I am in marching. And so I think what happens is that if they ... eradicate the middle class and push all of these middle-class people back into the lower class, financially and economically... this lower class is now going to take to arms. There's going to be more crime and more outrage [and] because of this crime and poverty people are going to stand up and say hey we're not gonna take it anymore. And then they'll try to change a little bit.

*There is a growing wealthy- poor divide.*

While most of the participants felt that people in poverty in the U.S. were better off than poor people in other parts of the world, they also perceived that the numbers of people in poverty have been growing. The consensus was that the growing poverty has resulted from the effects of globalization and or corporate greed, most notably re-locating manufacturing abroad, and the widespread outsourcing of technical jobs. The most commonly articulated repercussions are the loss of consumer base in our economy and the loss of tax revenue for services. Some spoke of the loss of a middle class way of life. Rick spoke about how he sees the middle class as a bridge between the wealthy and the poor:

I do look at a successful middle class as kind of a good indicator of the stability of a community. When you get to a country where you have only the poor and the extremely wealthy, that doesn't seem like a very healthy balance to me ... As we go to more jobs within the service industry... less paying jobs and less so-called professional jobs. Doctors are now being replaced by technicians... and I strongly put doctors in that middle class category. And so we're taking that category and replacing it with a technician who makes \$20 an hour and still has to pay for their own health care and all that stuff. I see that in almost every aspect of the business- working world within the United States... We are getting two separate lifestyles that aren't going to be able to communicate with the needs of each other.

*Wages are falling and not getting ahead.*

Several people talked about the fact that even though they are economically stable at the moment, they can't seem to get ahead. Barbara includes her extended family in this situation. Her Mother was divorced when she was ten years old, and raised Barbara along with her five siblings as a single parent. Barbara feels as though she should be able to get beyond where she has been the past fifteen years working at Ford:

[My parents] provided for us until we were in high school... But there was just like nothing to pass on, and we never thought of it. We just thought, you get your own because that's how we were raised. But now we have kids and we're just thinking, and my brother and I have talked about this a lot, we should have something. Have some kind of business that we could pass it on to our kids.... Even some land or something. ... so they won't have to work as hard, or they'll have a start already. That they can just pick it up and go with it and further it. ... We haven't started anything yet. We've got plans... but that's how I guess the economy effects us, the fact were doing OK with just like living. But we just need a little bit more so that we can get to this other plateau.... But it's like, there's nothing, nothing yet you know....

Richard feels that the prosperity that we often hear about is not being realized by his neighbors and the people he knows. He suggests that increasing economic pressure makes it more difficult for people to see what is happening around them:

I think for a lot of people it's getting very tough. To make ends meet, it seems people are having to work just ungodly hours.... Right now there's this phony bubble going on, it looks prosperous, but you look at those statistics and there are just a lot of people in dire poverty. I don't know how they're getting by. I think it's because everything is kind of set up ... where everybody's sort of



isolated in pockets right now. They don't talk to each other, and they have no way of talking to each other.... it seems people are more disjointed and separate from each other.

*Positioning cheap labor against living wage jobs.*

Several people discussed the tension between the continual corporate push for cheap labor and the workers right to living wage jobs. Barbara continued her discussion about not getting ahead by looking at what is happening today in her own situation:

So now they're going to wanna cut our salaries. So ...they might want to cut us by five dollars an hour. And then give us a little money to accept back. So where does it stop you know what I'm saying? So then the next time around they'll cut this so they can stay open, so we can run, so we can make money and be profitable. I don't know if that's kind of into the union thing, but it's a thing with the country, it's not just here.

Richard broadened the discussion about falling wages, by looking at how global free trade pacts have unglued local communities rendering regional demands for sustainable living wages impotent:

I guess it's people's right to get together ... have control of their lives at their workplace and in their community. I think that's really been taken away. You cannot join the union anymore, really. Actually with trade laws, maybe your community can't disallow certain things now ...if the community standards are higher than the international trade laws say, the trade law would usurp the community standards. It's just taking it away from the hands of the many and putting it into the hands of a few I think. I just don't think these huge macro masters all over the place are that sharp or that bright. They just have all the power.

*Corporations pitting worker against worker.*

Many participants felt an increasing need to compete against other workers for jobs. Several participants see this as not just a local issue, but connected to businesses moving to other regions of the country, as well as outside of the U.S. An important subtext to these discussions was immigration, both legal and illegal. Demetrius spoke about how he feels corporations exploit new arrivals by leveraging undocumented status,

and desperation to depress wages. He feels that this is happening any time you see a business made up of one ethnicity and does not represent the broader community in which it resides.

I think it's so unfair ... for the corporations to put... different ethnic groups against each other. Competing over crap, little bull shit jobs. In my town Hopkins we've got a Chipotle. And the town is maybe point zero zero two percent Hispanic. And yet the whole store is Hispanic ... The reason they're there is basically because they work cheap.... you can't tell me anything else but. ...once you get down to the dishwashers and meat cutters, it's all Hispanics. And I don't blame them, I'm not mad at them. I'm mad at the way it's set up. But once they get in they make sure they don't tell anybody else but their Hispanic friends. They don't want nobody working with them. ... Lake Street is a pretty diverse community. Come on now, everybody shops there but yet everybody can't work there. ... That's one of my main issues right there. All down Lake Street. There's no diversity. If you don't speak Spanish, even if you're Mexican, if you don't speak Spanish you ain't never going to get a job there. The menus are written in Spanish, they don't even want you in there. But yet we have to train them for our jobs so that they can get in the business. And I think that's so unfair.

Demetrius went on to suggest that city, county and state governments turn a blind eye on new arrivals, ignoring housing codes and parking violations in order to support business's access to this cheap labor.

*Loss of neighborhood work tied to racism.*

Demetrius also sees the city government abandoning the affirmative action initiatives that he feels were designed to support neighborhood employment on citywide construction projects. He sees the fallout of this change as racially charged:

I look at the construction crews. They're all young white teenagers. And the kids living in those neighborhoods, look at that and you say shit... you know I put an application at West construction company or the other construction company, Bryant's. And they don't hear from them. They go to a little apprenticeship program they got over there off of Olson highway. They graduate, they do everything they're supposed to do. But yet when they put the application in nobody hires them, nobody calls them back. But yet they ride down the street, they see some young 17-year-old white kid, who isn't even out of high school sitting behind a pavement roller. What the hell?... No, hell no. So you know, you get destructive. I would. I don't want your

money, if I can't work for you, if I can't benefit from this project why should I support it? And that's the way I feel a lot of young kids are feeling disenfranchised....The [construction going on] on Lake Street, Thomas & sons, there from Rogers Minnesota. The companies based in Rogers Minnesota. Why? I know of all the contracts they probably got the lowest bid. But I thought a government bid, they had to do a certain criteria. They had to have a livable wage, livable benefits, and hire from the community. But you don't see it.

*Inability to find income replacing work.*

As the plant threatens to close, and some have taken buyout packages and separated from the company, word of the difficulties people are having finding income replacing jobs filters into daily discourse at the plant. As Rick ponders his own probable job search, he also suggests that this is an historical turning point for the U.S.:

And there's less and less people from those lower classes ... I'm just using that as a general classification... who no longer have access to jobs like what we had here at Ford. Which took somebody who was willing to work, had the ability to learn some basic job skills and stuff like that. And give them a decent income and a decent foothold in that average middle-class community. I just don't see it. And of course I'm out there trying to find it. But I'm not seeing it. I'm not finding it for myself to move into....

Richard sees both historical and global influences taking shape in our current economy. Again, immigration is an interwoven theme:

It's like we're becoming a big Third World. Wages are dropping so fast right now. And they have the whole propaganda machine going about whose valuable and who isn't. Were devaluing whole sectors of society. When they first started, we allowed this back probably in the 40s and 50s with the Mexican Braseros, allowed them to come up and do these substandard wages and all this kind of work. And now the chickens have come home to roost ...

*Markets being destroyed.*

Several people brought up the notion that as living wages fall in this country, the consumer markets for durable goods like cars will be diminished. Some focused on the loss of the infrastructure that physically supports these markets, such as transportation, wholesale and retail outlets, as well as the industries which produce these goods. Monte

makes the argument that globalization seems to be hurting almost everyone. He supports reversing the globalization project of “Free Trade” through the use of tariffs that he believes have kept U.S. goods made with higher wages competitive in our domestic markets. Monte’s last point about markets being local tied in with what Richard suggested about community control over standards such as minimum wages.

Globalization threatens everybody and not just people in rich countries but people in poor countries. I can't find someone who says ... I win from globalization. I really come out on top. I think there's probably a few Fortune 500 companies or people who are trying to push goods, like oil barons, the people who sell food I guess ... I think they'll benefit. But it's a very minute portion of the world population. I think in general a poor family in Mexico is going to lose on globalization because, I hate to say this, because Ford is going to build trucks there and they're going to make them much cheaper than they would have to pay us and I think that's not a fair wage for them. And at the same time our jobs are leaving this country and so it's not fair to us. And then to top it off we're being flooded by cheaper imports. There was a time when there were tariffs on Japanese or imported cars and so we were able to compete because even though they were able to make them for cheaper they had to sell them for more money over here. ... In other words you couldn't sell a Japanese car over here in the same class as the Ford Ranger for a much cheaper price. You couldn't do it because of the tariffs. Now they can beat us just by... they have cheaper labor. So everyone loses on globalization. Nobody wins because you know markets are really local. They are more community-based than they are global. And when you export things, to me, you kind of tip the balance you, sway things. And nobody wins there except for the people pulling the strings.

*Paying living wages for consumption.*

Many of the participants alluded to the fact that people working in factories are no longer able to afford the products they are making, part of a set of economic principles commonly known as Fordism. Brennan captured this notion in the first interview:

...And I don't know if it's even true anymore, but how Henry Ford said I want to be able to have my employees ... afford the vehicles I build. ... His family [are] now billionaires because of that philosophy. So I wonder how people think they can still make all that money by having more slave labor out of the country and taking jobs away from people who actually buy their products. ... It's an interesting spiral going in the wrong direction.

For many of the participants, the fallout from losses to the middle class appeared to be leading to the kind of desperation seen in many developing countries.

*Helplessness leading to crime.*

One example given was about chronically unemployed college graduates in Nigeria joining gangs involved in robbery and extortion in order to feed their families. Richard talked about what he sees as the brutal turn of events in Poland as being the natural extension of what is beginning in this country:

In Poland ... it looks like a very two class society: the have nothings and the have everything's. ... I don't think that's what people really want.... I think in brief periods of time it was better for them....All of a sudden they bought into all these libertarian fools from the United States. You know shock therapy and all that kind of stuff. They got completely co-opted. I've talked to people who have been there... [They] have very rich friends and they're just so disgusted with the average poor person because all they do is rip everybody off. If somebody has something expensive, because some people are filthy rich there, you have to have it nailed down practically or it'll get stolen or sabotaged. Hey I can understand that.

Several people spoke about the increased visibility of poor and homeless people on the street asking for help. Participants also spoke about the loss of parts or all of the social safety net in this country such as unemployment benefits and welfare as well as the loss of funding for schools, parks and other public goods. In addition the costs of goods such as housing, gas and food have seemed to steadily rise.

The topic *Loss of the Middle Class* was clearly on the minds of these autoworkers in varying forms. It functions as a generative theme in that there are many subtexts or themes which can be derived through dialogue and offers a great deal of space for a wide range of project possibilities. Another major topic that emerged from the first interviews with similar promise as a generative theme was *Raising Children: from a community perspective*.

*Raising Children: From a Community Perspective*

There were six statements that made up the synopsis page for this second generative theme (see Table 7). As with the first, these statements represent the broad views of all 16 participants, though the quotes that follow are only from the participants who ultimately made up this second group *Raising Children: from a community perspective*.

The individual themes that make up this line of thought around raising children emerged more in indirect ways than through declarative statements or named issues. They were woven into critiques of the current state of the economy, reminiscences about the past growing up, and in projections about the future. Children often came up when participants were expressing their worst fears about what they saw going on at the fringes of our society, in neighborhoods riddled with poverty, and in countries experiencing more widespread desperation. For many, there is an inexorable linkage between the need for both parents to be employed full time outside of the home and the growing stresses they see in raising children both as parents and as neighbors and community members. There is also a sense that community resources are drying up, that there are not as many options as there have been in the past for kids that do not require significant costs to parents.

**Table 7 Raising Children: from a community perspective themes:**

*Once vibrant communities where neighbors worked in local businesses, and spent most of their time in the community has shifted.*

*In economic good times, families and kids have more time for social activities, people are too busy now*

*Every year there seems to be less and less volunteerism.*

*We are losing economic support for community infrastructure*

*Fewer families know each other*

*There seems to be a growing fear and lack of respect in the community*

*Once vibrant communities where neighbors worked in local businesses, and spent most of their time in the community has shifted.*

When asked to look back at different aspects of their early years, most of the participants were remarkably nostalgic. Though their childhoods occurred across four seemingly, very different decades (the 1950's 1960's, 1970's and 1980's) there was a common sense that things were better for kids when they themselves were growing up. One aspect of this remembrance was that more people seemed to work locally, near where they lived. Reflecting upon the data further, it seems that the idea of a vibrant neighborhood also included connections with adults in the neighborhood, whether they be extended family members, or other caring people living in the same or nearby neighborhoods. Marissa, whose grandfather ran a corner grocery store through the depression, holds her memories of him as a symbol of that neighborhood employment. There was pride in her voice when she described what she had learned about her

grandfather's past; how the grocery continued to provide credit to customers in need even though the money would never be recovered. She also remembers vividly when the large chain stores came in and he was forced out of business. Another participant discussed at length, his early years in Gary, Indiana. Though the city was hard pressed after the first wave of factory closings, the organizations and infrastructure, which worked with kids in his neighborhood, were still thriving. He remembers playing organized street hockey, spending hours a day in the summer at his local pool, and going to day camps. He remembers knowing everyone in his neighborhood, including the shop owners and their kids.

Teresa talked about the early years in the Cabrini-Green housing projects in Chicago where her grandparents lived. Her memories of the 1960's tell of a far different place than the legendary symbol of urban decay and poverty they became in the 1980's and 1990's:

My grandparents are from Mississippi in the South.... they came up ... to Chicago. My grandmother was a big ... civic-minded leader in her community. In Chicago when they first built the projects, my grandmother was a community advocate about those. The way people talk about the projects in the negative sense, that's not how I saw them growing up. My grandmother won awards for the best vegetable garden, best garden, there were no gangs. ... Unfortunately a lot of things that young people experience [now], we didn't. We got a chance to actually be kids and have fun. My grandfather had a candy stand, he was like a candy stand of the neighborhood. We never got anything free. If you wanted something you paid for it like everybody else. Or either you earned it by working the candy stand.... nothing free.

*In economic good times, families and kids have more time for social activities, people are too busy now.*

Some of the participant's nostalgia seems tied to the view that the pace of life was slower when they were growing up. Lenny spent many of his younger years in the 1950's



on the Iron Range in Minnesota; a region dotted with small towns and nearby iron ore mines. Both his parents grew up on farms, and though Lenny's dad worked as an operating engineer for the 49'ers union, there were always gardens being worked around his home. Lenny remembers being free in the summers to come and go as he pleased, often spending long hours fishing the local lakes and streams. Though he spoke of being very independent as a child, he has a markedly different view of what is taking place today:

As far as raising kids, like I said, it's almost a necessity that both parents work. And they're stressed. And they'd like to do things with their kids but ... They're working more hours, the money isn't going further. ... I think some kids have to learn on their own. Because... they only see their parents for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening. And they have to find their own... way. I grew up in a different generation and my parents were always there. And you always had mom if something happened. She was there to say okay this is right or this is wrong. Don't try this, don't try that. Now I think the kids... have more time by themselves and I think some of them, they don't know what to do with this time.

Marisa sees the progression from one parent working outside the home to both parents as a troubling shift in which she herself is a part of:

I see jobs like I have where you had the ability to work hard and one person could have supported a family... But that's going to go away. And that's been leading to other things. So then what happens, Mom and Dad works, then maybe dad has to work two jobs. Then what happens to the kids? They get left home alone.

Marissa envisions the loss of living wage jobs pushing families in other ways as well: "...The unintended consequences. Poorer kids being in worse neighborhoods that are more conducive to being in crime... More people in desperate situations.... More kids just not having families, a home, if no one is around..."

Uchembua sees the desperation that grips some parents today as having a lasting impact on their children:

You have all these children that don't have any hope. Because they've seen the [jobs] that put their parents to where they were, aren't there anymore. And they believe there is no hope for them...it starts falling apart. ...The kind of jobs that we used to have to sustain life we're losing and we need to get those kind of jobs back.

Brent experienced growing up in a family where both parents worked and feels that people often make choices about pursuing a desired lifestyle. Even though he feels that he thrived in this situation, he has a sense that the circumstances are very different now:

The time aspect for everyone, we have less time. But I feel like,... nobody wants to sacrifice the means of how they're living, even though they can afford to a lot of times. Say even me and my wife, we're raising a kid. Technically we could afford to stay at home or work part-time. I think kids need more nurturing so, it's better to have a parent around. I'm not going to lie; I was the latchkey kid. Either I stayed at school or I went to the park until Mama got home...I think another crisis is a living wage crisis. It is unfortunate that both parents have to work for say a family of four to get by. Not everybody can have two parents working at Ford. I call these semi decent jobs, you could almost, if you're fiscally sound you could budget your money to have the wife stay at home, or the husband stay at home, working here, raising the kids. And there's not many jobs like that.. it's all over the country. I mean Minnesota is one of the nicer states where there are more of living wage jobs. ... I feel like people are so busy trying to get by that they don't have time to think about how well they're [doing] to raise their kid. They're doing the best job they can, but they don't have time to sit down and actually think about what's the next best thing for them...

*Every year there seems to be less and less volunteerism.*

Around the edges of these economic concerns, the stress and limitations of time on parenting and the impact they have on kids, there are other human resource issues that surfaced. There was an undercurrent throughout many of the interviews that other people seem to be dropping the ball on the responsibilities of parenting and being active in the community. Some of these critiques took general aim at young people having children

while still in high school, but much of the responsibility for why this happens was directed at the adults who are of the age to take on community leadership. Teresa works with teen moms through her church, and though she spoke about the poor choices she sees being made by high school aged kids, she became much more animated and perplexed when she turned to what she sees as a cultural shift in the fabric of our society:

You don't find men who mentor anymore. We don't have the type of role models we used to have. Now if you're not an athlete or a rapper, that's what they look at in terms of success, we don't have them stepping out of other arenas. Stepping up to the plate to show them that there's more than just that. We don't have the science community stepping up. We don't have the political community stepping up. There's other arenas that we should have stepping up but they're not because they have their titles, they have their position, so they don't have to worry about anything else.

*We are loosing economic support for community infrastructure.*

Brent remembers participating in after school programs and activities that were mainly put together and run by volunteers from the neighborhood. He sees the shift away from volunteerism as having hampered our ability to respond creatively to what kids need and want. This has consequences for neighborhoods particularly in an environment of shrinking public funding:

I worry that there aren't enough after school activities for the kids to do. It seems in the last two years I've noticed a lot of graffiti going up a cross south Minneapolis. They figured out the skateboard thing, putting skateboard parks out all over the place, why not put up a graffiti park if this is what they want to do. They've done it other places.

Several people spoke about how small neighborhood parks used to have programs for kids after school, on weekends, all year round. There is a general sense that there are programs available, but there are fees that many people can't afford, and they often take place far away requiring transportation. Teresa has lived in Chicago, Minneapolis, and in

two different neighborhoods of Saint Paul. She has seen community programming diminish throughout her life and feels it reflects on our values a society:

I can remember when we were young we had “Social Center”. Social center was where you learned to hone and sharpen your social skills in all areas. They don't have that anymore. Now the community parks, they've cut the money to them. They don't have the outreach programs anymore. We don't hear about any of those things. Every election the first thing they want to be throwing in your face is the educational system... they're not doing none of that. They use it as a political grandstand. It's not real anymore... Excuse me but you don't have to be a brain surgeon or a genius to figure out the fact that the way they're shifting things around, they're making it where people are expendable. Children are expendable. It doesn't matter who or what you are, you are expendable.

*Fewer families know each other.*

Another theme which surfaced often in the interviews was the challenge people face connecting with neighbors. Lenny feels that he is pretty outgoing and tries to connect with neighbors on his block and across the alley from his home. Even though he is actively engaged, there are many people he still doesn't know including many of the kids on the block. “There's a lot of people that they've lived in the same house in the same neighborhood for 10, 15 years and they don't even know their neighbors. Which is sad.”

Camilla spoke passionately about the lack of connection between her family and the surrounding neighborhood (see ch3). She took some responsibility for her situation, being very busy with two teenaged children at home, and she also revealed the tension she feels balancing her desire for privacy and connecting more deeply with her neighbors.

Marissa visited Venezuela and was surprised to see how cohesive local neighborhoods appeared to be. “I think it stems from depending on each other. I saw that in Venezuela when I was down there. They still had the corner grocery stores, and the kids in the community all played with one another. There has definitely been a loss of that [here].”

Marissa felt that the cohesiveness she observed was constructed out of community interdependence. The contrast between where Marissa is, sitting on the back deck of her suburban home, and this other place on another continent seems also to represent a distance in time that parallels much of what the participants remember from their youth. *There seems to be a growing fear and a lack of respect in the community.*

Several participants spoke about a the growing fear in our society today, especially in comments about how they feel kids can't be safe doing the things that they themselves did when they were children. Debating whether this fear is justified or contrived and mediated somehow does not diminish its palpable presence in the minds of many of these participants. There is a perception that there are more predators around than ever before and there have been shifts in the fabric of our culture. One of these perceived shifts is a growing disrespect among young people today. Camilla talks about how difficult it is for her teenage daughter to grow up in this climate. She was very distressed as she retold a story her daughter spoke of just days before the interview:

Yes... we're losing our values... like our old values, they don't count anymore and I think they should count. You've gotta have values in your house. Girls over here, everywhere they go so low to get a man. Things that we never did before. Maybe it's been all the time but I never hear those things before. It's really sad. Like my daughter, they invite her to go out to a club ... My daughter says I don't need to go in there because the boys they don't dance. The boys wait in private rooms, waiting for someone to come and pick them up. My daughter she goes 'No I'll never go pick up a guy. If they want to dance with me they can come and ask me...

Uchembua brought up what he sees as growing tension between adults and neighborhood kids based in large part on a disconnection between people living within the community. His children are grown and living in different parts of the country now,

but it is not hard for him to imagine how they would be as adolescents today, in what he sees as a changing environment:

If my kid gets out there and they don't respect you, after awhile you're just going to say forget it. If you see a bunch of kids that are just not respectful, you go back in your house and just lock the door... If kids come out there in order to see [the adults], and they're saying good morning sir, good afternoon sir, ...being nice and everything. You are more willing to ask 'How you doing?' If you see them go the wrong way you say oh man this kid is a better kid than this. You are more likely to get involved. But because these kids are just out, most of them are wild, you're more likely to be in your house and close the door, because you don't know what they will do if you go ask them what's going on. That's what's going on... I think in some communities today it is dead.

These autoworkers have vivid perceptions about the costs that changes in the economic and social fabric have had on children. When they look back, times seem to have been better for kids. When they look forward they are almost universally upset by what looks to be an ever-worsening future for most children. Community disconnection, diminishing resources, and increased economic pressure on families seem to all play a role in these perceptions.

#### Participant Codes

After completing all of the first interviews and gleaning the various themes from the data, a second round of interviews commenced. These interviews had several dimensions, beginning with time to answer any questions the participants might have, as well as an opportunity for the researcher to seek clarification on enigmatic data. The interviewees received a summary packet several days prior to their second meeting. These summary documents contained only their individual information, covering general demographics in the form that would most likely be used in the dissertation, as well as many possible quotes that related to the themes that had been identified from the first interview data. There was time set aside to clarify any misreading of the quoted material.

Initial planning devoted half of the 60 to 90 minute interview to these clarifying steps. Surprisingly, there were very few questions from the participants, and outside of some inclination to correct grammar; there was very little discussion about the transcriptions of their spoken words.

The remaining dimensions of this second interview related to the creation of participant generated codes. The discussion centered on the synopsis page and the stories represented by each statement and began with a review of the specific generative theme. Representing the elements of the specific generative theme offered the possibility to locate each participants voice within the broader context of the myriad responses collected across the group of 16 autoworkers.

The next step in this process was to ask the participants to name an aspect of the generative theme that they felt strongly about. Specifically they were asked to think for a few moments about what they felt were major issues within the theme and see if they could come up with one they considered to be a cornerstone or fundamental issue. Some were able to choose right away, but most people needed time to think, as well as more clarification. Introducing the concept of contradictions within the generative theme at this juncture usually moved these discussions into a richer and more meaningful state. By touching upon the notion of a dialectical relationship between one aspect of our society in tension with another, many participants began to articulate problems or limit situations within the generative theme. One aspect of contradiction that seemed to resonate with many people began by examining some of the inherent tensions between the reality perceived by these autoworkers and the way our society portrays this reality.

The discussions and codes presented in the following two sections represent thoughts and ideas from those autoworkers that were able to continue and participate in the group work.

### *Raising Children Codes*

The following discussion represents the work of Brent, Uchembua, Teresa, Lenny, Marissa, and Camilla.

Brent's major issues within the theme *Raising Children*, centered on the fact that adults today don't seem to have time to connect with kids. He feels that on the whole we are losing touch with young people. This idea is developed out of his own experience. He feels as though he was very connected with adults as a child, but now has little idea of what kids are thinking. People don't have the flexibility in their work to participate in their kids' daily activities. This also seems to be diminishing the ability of adults to volunteer.

He suspects that people aren't sitting down to dinner with their kids as much any more. As well he feels that kids aren't involved in as many structured activities in the neighborhood as in the past. They seem to be missing the adult interaction that used to be offered by parks and recreation programs and local schools. Though he is very active on his block, organizing neighborhood parties and other meetings as needed, he knows that it is only a few people who make this happen. Without a few committed "Crazy neighbors" or "facilitators" on the block these events don't happen. He arrived at the idea that "People are so busy... doing nothing". He has friends who spend a lot of time away from their kids. He feels that these adults could plan better and spend more time with their children.



Brent's passion for food and community organizing seemed to blend together in his ideas for a code. He envisioned signs in the neighborhood, on park benches and billboards that promoted family interaction around food. One might say "Sit down with your family and eat dinner". Another sign might have a more neighborhood theme, promoting a potluck dinner of some kind.

Brent had in mind a particular quote that he saw in a book recently. It summed up the idea that sharing food was at the root of people's relationships with each other; it is an essential part of community building. We looked together on a number of web sites that offered food quotes, but couldn't find it. Brent said he would find the quote, and then we could either simply print it out on a piece of paper or see if we could think of a way to show it as a billboard on a park bench. Brent was never able to come up with the quote for the code. He described his idea during the first group meeting.

The cornerstone issue within the *Raising Children* code for Uchembua dealt with the need for businesses to step up and be responsible for the communities in which they do business. They can do this by financially supporting the infrastructure that provides kids with opportunities, like parks and schools, and supporting organizations which reach out to children, like boys and girls clubs. They can also help by promoting business ventures in neighborhoods, employing neighborhood residents, including summer employment for kids:

Corporations should invest in neighborhoods, you know have parks and build parks where kids can go and play and not be in the streets. That should be their contribution. And they should create jobs so say in the summertime they have opening, part time jobs for the children. Keep them busy, that would help out a lot... And then that would make them more responsible citizens, wanting that range of experience. By learning how to work. And seeing that these companies want to help them out. When they get older, they might want to work for the company, and might want to even help the company out.

Ford Motor Company, at one time, donated some land for a ballpark on the southeast corner of the plant property. Uchembua suggested getting a picture of the field with the Ford Oval logo on it. I took several pictures of the field and e-mailed them to him. He chose one of the pictures and sent back two suggested slogans, “Company and community working toward a better tomorrow”, and “Corporate citizenship.” I resent two copies of the chosen picture with one of the two slogans on each. When he saw the picture and quote together, he chose the one that said “Corporate Citizenship” (see Figure 3).

Teresa’s cornerstone centered on a struggle against the institutional racism and bigotry sustained by the “Good old boy white power structure.” She feels that this is at the root of the stress that children face growing up today. She recalled a film about a civil rights activist called “The Vernon Johns Story”, where Vernon is remembered to say “If you ever see a good fight, go get in it”.

She had an idea for a visual image that hangs on a wall in her house. It is a portrait from local autoworker well known through out the plant for his superb artwork. She describes the scene:

. . . a town of people where all the trees around the town have men hanging from [them]. And you really have to look at it to see the men hanging... Its just like people going about their business and all these trees around them. But as you look into the picture and watch the different angles of where the people are doing their regular things, then you’ve got all these men hanging from the trees. Everybody is just going about their business and that’s the way we are today, it’s the same concept.

Teresa was going to take a picture of it, or a part of it that showed people ignoring the trees, and then perhaps we would figure out a way to attach the quote from Vernon Johns. She didn’t end up taking the picture, but she described her ideas about it to the group in the first session.

Figure 3 Participant Generated Code  
Uchembua Raising Kids: From a Community Perspective  
(Originally color ink on 8/12 X 11 paper)

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Lenny articulated his cornerstone issue this way:

Kids now days, I think, have to make tough decisions on their own. And some of them are right and some of them are wrong because they don't have the parents there to say ok let's sit down and talk about what's is going on in your life. And then Mom's going to this and Dad's going to the gym to work out or whatever... It all kind of goes back to this is such fast paced world... Kids have to make tough decisions at an early age... a lot of times the Grandparents are in another state...

Lenny was yet another participant who felt that families don't sit down to eat like they used to. Parents seem to be gone so much more of the time. He also felt that peer pressure on kids today was tremendous and linked to material goods like MP3 players and tennis shoes.

His idea for a code struck at the idea of decision making:

If we could paint a picture as this kid is standing on the corner and this big ball of fire is coming down from the sky toward him, and the caption would read “What do I do now?” The kid would be about 16. Another caption could be “Where are my parents now?”

He came up with an image of kids hanging out on a fairly major intersection three blocks away from his house. The difficulty was getting a picture. We both tried, but because the weather was getting cold they weren't coming to the corner. I found a number of promising pictures on the internet and sent them to him via email. We got together and explored the idea of creating a meteor looking fireball on a picture. We found one that Lenny liked with a group of boys and girls, and this one boy pulling a hat down over his eyes. He decided to just add the caption “What do I do now?”

Marissa's recurring theme was that parenting and being a part of a community is very difficult when both parents are working all the time. She feels that if people had livable wages, then at least one of the parents could stay home, or work less than a full time job in order to spend time with the kids.

Marissa had a difficult time thinking of what a code could be. “Show the kid playing on the computer and the parent is gone here and the parent is gone there. I'm guilty of it, I'm guilty of it all the time. I come home exhausted; I say the wrong thing all the time.”

I intervened at this point to steer her away from judging herself as a parent. I suggested that she had an intricate knowledge of parenting, and that the idea was to put her knowledge together with other knowledges in dialogue in order to build an understanding about her cornerstone issue.

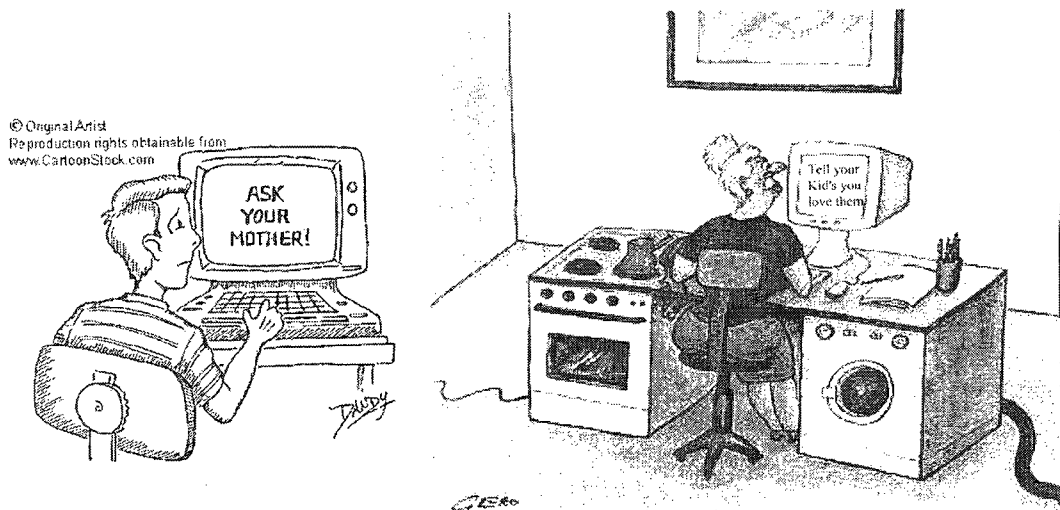
Figure 4 Participant Generated Code  
*Lenny Raising Kids: From a Community Perspective*  
(Originally color ink on 8/12 X 11 paper)

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Marissa suggested another image, “So there’s no communication, they could all be in different rooms in the same house.” She also perceives that people don’t stay together as much as in the past. She told a story about a couple getting a divorce because the husband spent time on the internet. The technology piece seemed important to her.

Figure 5 Participant Generated Code  
 Marissa *Raising Kids: From a Community Perspective*  
 (Originally on 8/12 X 11 paper)



At the time of the second interview we were in her office that is perched above literally hundreds of welding robots twisting and jutting and sparking all day long. She had internet access and together we were able to go out on the internet. She found two cartoons that worked well. One showed a boy at a computer, and on the screen in big letters a message said “Ask your mother”. The other showed a woman sitting at a computer in an office setting, dressed professionally. There was a cook top on one side of the desk, and the woman was working on the computer. Marissa wanted to put a slogan in the screen of the computer, so we added a little text box that said “Tell your kids you love them”. It was indicative of a calendar reminder for a busy executive.

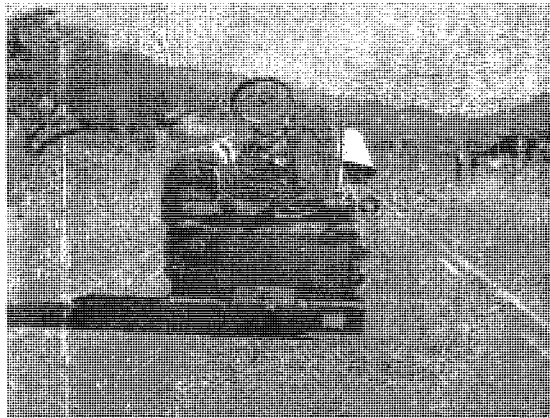
Camilla did not end up offering an idea for a code. Our discussions in the second interview turned toward the current tensions she was struggling with in her own family.

Figure 6 Participant Generated Code  
 Richard, *Loss of the Middle Class*  
 (Originally color ink on 8/12 X 11 paper)

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## What Now?



As time elapsed, she suggested that she would think about a code, and let me know. I checked with her several times prior to the group work, but an idea was never articulated.

### *Loss of the Middle Class Codes*

The following discussion represents the work of Rick, Richard, Demetrius, Barbara, Monte, and Brennan.

Richard's major concern is how this demise of the middle class affects people who are feeling the full impact of the economic shift. He returns to the human rights

stance he mentioned in the first interview. “Roof over your head, a place for your family, some place with human dignity. Basic essentials. Were really getting to the point where this is really a problem.”

For a code, he talked about images of people panicking, moving in with friends and relatives, kids being pulled out of schools. He remembered seeing a family on the move, and described it this way:

Driving along highway 94 one day and there was a beat up old truck with a trailer on the back. Mattresses and everything in it and a couple of kids in the back holding the shit in going down the freeway. It didn't look like these guys were really having a good stable time. They were lucky to have good weather.

I agreed to look on the Internet to find some pictures and send them to him. I forwarded perhaps 50 pictures of trucks moving, families living out of cars, and foreclosures where belongings were simply dumped out onto the sidewalk in front of the house. He chose two pictures, a foreclosure, and then a little pickup filled with bikes and blankets and other stuff. Between the two pictures we put his idea for a statement, the question “What Now?”

Barbara focused in right away on the idea of a jobless person on the street looking for work. Barbara talked about her experiences recently applying for work in the Hospitality industry with no luck. She thought that the image of standing on the street with a sign captured how she has felt looking for work.



Figure 7 Participant Generated Code  
Barbara, *Loss of the Middle Class*  
(Originally color ink on 8/12 X 11 paper)

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She wanted to make sure however that it was clear that she was looking for work, and not a gift:

The first thing I think about is standing on a corner with a sign. I guess if I was making one, I would be looking for a job more so than a handout. So it would have to say something quick that they could read that would say something about looking for work ..it would probably have a number on it so they could call me and see what I was actually capable of doing.

We set up a time after work one day to meet, and I would take her picture. She got dressed like she was going in for a professional interview, with a suitcase and a sign

prepared. The sign said “Seeking Employment call 651-555-XXXX For Resume. We staged the picture on a busy street near the entrance to the plant.

A cornerstone for Rick was drawn from his vision that the elements of our economic system are very interconnected. His idea for a code comes from the film “It’s a Wonderful Life” starring the actor Jimmy Stewart in the role of George Bailey, the manager and part owner of a community Savings and Loan. The bank is in trouble as large numbers of customers attempt to retrieve their savings:

You know what comes to mind is “It’s a Wonderful Life”. That whole idea of putting that effort back into the community. ... I want to find out what George Bailey says when he explains why you leave your money in the bank. That’s the money that helps Mrs. Henderson have a mortgage on her house. People coming in with business thing. That would be a great quote. That whole idea of the middle class supporting the entire community. And when that resource of that local community bank disappears, there goes our safety net. Our resource of where we go and get money to keep the community alive and active through those tough times.

I told him I would try to see what pictures I could find from the movie and e-mail them to him to see if any would work. He settled on a picture where George Bailey is addressing a customer in front of the board of the savings and loan. The caption reads, “The money is not here... Your money’s in Joe’s house right next to yours... And the Kennedy’s house... Your lending them the money to build and then they’re going to pay you back” followed by “George Bailey on why the town people could not immediately withdraw all of their savings from the Bailey Savings and loan.”

Figure 8 Participant Generated Code  
 Rick, *Loss of the Middle Class*  
 (Originally on 8/12 X 11 paper)

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“The money is not here... Your money’s in Joe’s house right next to yours... And the Kennedy’s house... You’re lending them the money to build and then they’re gonna pay you back”

Demetrius had two major issues that he wanted to project. He was dismayed at the overwhelming number of products in stores made in China and the way that companies like Wal-Mart treat their employees. He is also fed up with Wal-Mart’s local competitor Target stores. He told this story about trying to find a product that was made in the U.S.:

I was looking for a doll at Target. I flipped one over, it said made in china. I flipped another, it said made in china. And another one. So I didn’t get one. I walked over to customer service and asked ‘Do you have anything in here that is not made in china?’ She told me ‘We can’t divulge that information’ (he laughs) those were her exact words.... One day we’re going to wake up without a job and all were going to be is a consumer. We’re not going to make nothing.

He also talked about how the media supports all of this activity because it supports Wall Street. He noted that when companies lay off workers and lower the bottom line, stock prices shoot up. Often when it is bad for the worker, it is good on Wall Street. This has been the pattern of this latest boom, which hasn't reached the middle class.

He wanted to get a picture of Wal-Mart products made in china. I found several pictures that could have worked, but none of them were exactly what he was looking for. He discussed his idea for this code at the first group meeting.

In thinking about the loss of the middle class, Monte saw irony in the fact that people aren't paying attention. He feels that earning livable wages creates a comfort and complacency that does not lend itself to becoming active and outraged when other middle class people lose their jobs. For a code, he has an image of a Ford worker, now out of work:

He'd be standing in front of a nice bright red Ford Explorer, something brand new. He'd have on coveralls. He'd be clean-shaven, but he'd look very angry. He'd have a cup in his hands with maybe some gloves with the cut off fingers...

We agreed that the picture would probably have to be staged. There was less than 30 minutes of light after work, so we would try to get it done during a lunch break. Unfortunately, Monte works in the very back of the main building, and would have to leave right away, get the picture done, and walk right back to the job without any lunch. Outside of working five 10 hour days, he works for an airline on Saturdays and Sundays. So it would be very difficult to squeeze it in. The picture never was produced, but Monte described the image during the first meeting.

Figure 9 Participant Generated Code  
Brennan, *Loss of the Middle Class*  
(Originally on 8/12 X 11 paper)

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Brenan feels that we really don't support other people in our community who have grievances against corporations. His feeling is that if you hear about Wall-Mart treating its employees poorly, or destroying large segments of local economies, then we should follow through and support boycotts. Then the economic pressure would be on them. When a multinational corporation decides to move out of a community, it should be much more than just the workers who are being laid off who resist, it should be the whole town.

In high school he read the *Grapes of Wrath* and it had a tremendous impact on him. We searched through some pictures from the movie on the internet, and found one with a person walking alone down a highway. Brennan thought that this really represented the idea of what it was like to stand up to a corporation without support. He added the statement "We can get together, or..."

The codes that were actually produced were all transferred onto 8 ½" X 11" standard photocopying paper. There were three printed codes for the group *Raising Children: from a community perspective* and four printed for the group *Loss of the Middle Class*.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Group Work

This chapter focuses on the work of two groups. It is divided into three main parts. The first is an overview of the group work process, how the groups were formed, where and when they met, and the purpose of the work. The second part is a summary of what each group accomplished, beginning with the group working on the theme *Raising Children: from a community perspective*, followed by the group working on the theme *The Loss of the Middle Class*. These two sections begin with descriptions of the project each group envisioned as far as they were developed, followed by a short synopsis of each of the group sessions. Focusing on the major themes presented in dialogue these summaries give an abridged accounting of what took place. An interpretive description of what occurred during each session, including quotes and dialogue in context can be found in Appendix C. In the attempt to use the participants' words when possible, and to describe the generative process through which these projects evolved, the interpretive description retells the process of each groups work with greater detail attempting to represent more fully the sequence of events.

#### *Group Work Overview*

The group work portion of this project was completed in a little over 2 months in the spring of 2008. The two groups that were formed under the generative themes *The Loss of the Middle Class*, and *Raising Children: from a community perspective*, were each scheduled to meet for three sessions each, with the meetings to last no more than 3 hours. Both groups ultimately chose to meet for an additional fourth meeting to complete their work. First meetings were set up in person, by phone and e-mail contacts, and the subsequent session schedules were tentatively arranged during each of the first group

meetings. The groups met every other week on alternating Friday afternoons as the assembly plant was on a four-day, ten-hour shift schedule running Monday through Thursday.

The participants in both groups decided that the plant represented the most centralized location for the meetings, and that the training center attached to the plant was a favorable setting. The meetings were held in a boardroom, with a large table, comfortable seating, a whiteboard and a wall of south-facing windows which allowed the work to take place in natural light. The table was arranged with food on one end and 7 chairs on the other, which formed a close “u” shaped group near a built in white board. The other chairs in the room were actually removed to the adjacent computer room, to accommodate movement around the table, and to directly define the space where the group should gather. I sat at one of the tops of u shape on the side closest to the doors, allowing group members to sit contiguously. Just outside of the boardroom there was a computer lab with internet access, and a printer. Nearby there was also a workroom with a photocopying machine

Of the sixteen participants who completed the interview process, four were unable to continue with the group work. Jack became ever busier with the birth of his second child, and Nina found herself overwhelmed at work, and at home. Bill obtained a new job with a different company in a northern suburb. Franklin was diagnosed with inoperable throat cancer, and was in the midst of a very successful round of radiation treatments at the time of the group work. The 12 remaining members were divided into two groups of six.

Determining the membership of each group was accomplished with three principles in mind: individual interest in the specific group theme, group diversity, and



group dynamics. Participants needed to have an interest in, and have shared in, the construction of the particular generative theme they would be working on. Freire's vision of dialogue supports the need for a strong presence that can counterbalance the dominant cultural assumptions which maintain existing power arrangements. As an extension of this idea, a diversity of race, ethnicity and gender were important. The final consideration had to do with group dynamics, simply making sure that there were no preexisting substantive conflicts between participants.

The two generative themes were articulated by the researcher as representations of a collection of important issues expressed by the participants in the interview portion of the project. Working outward from specific issues, both themes contained the concerns and hopes that surfaced among the statements and stories shared by nearly all the participants. This articulation made the process of placement more flexible, easing the resolution of the tension between the principles of group diversity and individual interest.

Using thematic alignment as a guide, the two groups broke out nearly balanced in terms of race and ethnicity, while gender was imbalanced. Other possible configurations could have balanced gender but seemed more forced and arbitrary. Since there were no known conflicts between participants, I chose to lean more heavily on thematic alignment. In the *Raising Children: from a community perspective* group, the participants included an Hispanic female (Camilla), an African American female (Teresa) and a white female (Marissa). The men in this group included one African American (Uchembua) and two white men (Brent and Lenny). In the group *Loss of the Middle Class*, the participants included one African American female (Barbara), two African American men (Monte, and Demetrius), and three white males (Brenan, Richard, and Rick).

### *Group Work Summaries*

#### *Raising Children: From a Community Approach.*

##### *Envisioned Project.*

##### Project mission:

To provide young adults with opportunities to gain knowledge, self-responsibility and team cohesion, while encouraging community involvement.

##### Project summary:

This project is based on a paid summer work program for inner-city teens that don't have anything else to do. The goal is to develop leadership and employment skills with them, and to encourage a sense of citizen service and participation and community ownership. Programs will be developed locally through neighborhood organizations and area schools as well as with various departments of the city. Members may be recruited through truancy programs, schools, and community groups. Oversight of the project will be shared by a community based board, a fiscal agent, and a managing staff. The staff could be college aged students working toward degrees in social work, education, or other social service professions with a cooperating university offering coursework and credits developed out of project participation. Volunteers will make up the rest of the adult participants, providing mentorship opportunities and technical expertise.

The teens will do a variety of work each day, which might include tasks such as street cleanup, gardening, graffiti cleaning, creating mural projects, constructing with Habitat for Humanity, planning and operational support for community celebrations and supporting the elderly in the community. An additional educational component will be developed supporting the work they will be doing including field trips and onsite job training.

### Approach:

Our goal is to provide a two-month summer program to employ, train, and mentor approximately 80 inner city teenagers. The activities the groups will be involved in will be developed locally with input from neighbors, community leaders, and teens that may be participating in the actual work. One avenue of recruitment will be to solicit the help of area schools and local police units to identify teens in truancy programs, and other individuals in need of or seeking interventions including employment, job training and mentoring. Other recruitment possibilities include the use referrals from neighborhood groups and community organizations. All of the participants will have to follow through with an orientation and interview processes, and adhere to firm attendance and behavior requirements.

A volunteer board made up of community members, representatives of city departments such as parks and recreation and police, area school representatives, and paid staff will help lead the project. A paid staff member will direct the project employed for a 1 year appointment, beginning 6 months prior to the beginning of the summer work.

The other staff involved in the project will be recruited mainly from local university students that are acquiring degrees in social work, education, and other social service professions. The university students may be able to be compensated through tuition scholarship, through a stipend based on an internship, or work as part of a credit agreement with a participating university.

This project will actively recruit volunteers, focusing on retirees from the community in which the project is based. The majority of the volunteers will work with the teens on a weekly basis, staying with one group throughout the project. Volunteers with specific skills might help organize and implement the activities with project staff.

The adult/teen ratio desired is one leader for a maximum of every four teenagers. This ratio takes into consideration that the leaders may need to help the teens develop the basic work skills needed to begin to work independently. The ultimate goal is to introduce the teens to the concept of being committed active citizens in their community.

Our desired first year's goal is for there to be 20 student/staff and at least 20 volunteers for 80 teenagers enrolled in the program.

The students will be the core key staff of this project, with one person overseeing approximately four team leaders. The team leaders will organize and facilitate each of the major activities. The remaining University students will be in charge of small groups of 5-7 teens, moving with them throughout their daily activities. These could be rotating rolls among all the leaders. The volunteers will augment the work of the students.

The compelling reason that this project should be funded is that this will impact the community by empowering the young adults (teens), building knowledge, self-responsibility, and teamwork while encouraging them to be conscientious and involved community citizens.

#### Background:

We are a small group of diverse parents who volunteered to work together on a research project focusing on the theme of raising kids as a community. We have taken historically innovative ideas that have worked in the past, and brought forth this new project that will work in today's environment.

#### Measurable outcomes:

The teens will enter and complete the program at a success rate of 90%. Other possible measurements would be to document the impact on local juvenile crime rates, and retention rates for these teens in school programs.

We would also solicit evaluation from the staff, teenagers, volunteers, parents, and neighborhood groups. We would also have staff and teenagers put presentations together that detail the work accomplished for the community.

*Session 1 summary.*

The participants for this first session were Camilla, Teresa, Marissa, Brent, and Lenny. Uchembua was absent. As people arrived, introductions were made and some time was given over to greeting old friends and acquaintances, and meeting some for the first time as well. As a starting point, I re-introduced the purpose of the sessions, and directed the dialogue to begin with the participant generated codes, some of which were lying out on the table. The ensuing conversation included not only each author's description of the concepts for each code, but also a broader context that included stories about growing up and perceptions of what is happening today. Many of the stories were reconstructions of those surfaced in the one on one interviews, but not all.

The major themes that surfaced around the code dialogue sorted into two main groups. The first consisted of nostalgic recollections of the past, which tended to be about spare material wealth and a great amount of unsupervised freedom. The second group of themes focused on perceptions of what is happening today, including a loss of trust in one another, an indictment of media influence on kids understanding of sexuality, drug culture, and material consumerism.

I facilitated a brief discussion around an interpretation of Freire's five preconditions for dialogue (2002, p.88-91). Working from four phrases, *value and respect, knowledge is fluid, positive possibilities, and unfinished projects*, the participants acknowledged their understanding and renewed their commitment to these preconditions. I introduced Brookfield's idea (2005, p.3) of developing everyday theory as a way of

introducing the legitimacy of organic knowledges. I also introduced the idea of *thinking critically* (Freire's fifth precondition) as a way of opening up a dialogue on praxis. After describing the interrelationship of action and reflection, the group participated in reflection, focusing on what had taken place earlier in the session and touched on the major themes such as lack of trust, media influence and consumerism. As an action step the group decided to continue the dialogue around problems facing kids today.

Several themes surfaced in the time remaining before the end of the first session. Participants were concerned with the cultural disconnection with elders in US society. Several participants were involved in the care of an elderly parent and talked about some of the difficulties they had experienced. The question of how to change culture arose and a few ideas were offered. One was to use a commercial media approach to promote what is good about two parent families. Another was to go deep into communities and hold group meetings similar to what was being experienced in this first session. The hopeful outgrowth of these meetings would be that neighbors become more understanding of one another by getting to know each other's issues.

The session ended with the next meeting scheduled, and a commitment to write up the notes from the session and send them out to all participants.

#### *Session 2 summary.*

The participants arrived and again, time was set aside for introductions. It was the first time for Uchembua, joining Camilla, Marissa, Brent, and Lenny. Teresa was absent for this session. Uchembua spoke about growing up in rural Nigeria, and the disillusion his siblings and cousins felt after leaving to come to the US. He commented, "These things we had when we were children, which we loved so much, we haven't transferred to our children."

As a way of introducing the idea of looking to the horizon, to see how things should or could be, I introduced the idea of Heterotopia which is discussed in Chapter Two theoretical underpinnings. Armed with the idea that they could suspend their disbelief, to step away from limit situations in order to see the horizon more clearly, the group began reflecting on the themes that surfaced during the prior session. These themes included the loss of trust we have with each other in community, the loss of the essential link between elders and children, kids are required to grow up too fast, and the media is part of the problem. This idea about “the media” was not well developed, but there seemed to be an almost universal negative response to what I might call mediated popular culture, the influence of television, movies, magazines etc. . . . The last major theme that came out of the reflection was that to begin to challenge these cultural issues, there would need to be a strong foundation for change. Once this foundation was in place, it could connect through schools directly with families, through neighborhood organizations, or community center programming.

The group agreed to look to the horizon as an action step for the next segment of the session. The ensuing dialogue did not focus on the horizon, but rather extended the discussion on problems facing raising kids in the community. Themes that surfaced were eroding parent responsibility, the increasing pressure to work more and more hours, especially mothers, and further discussions on consumerism, marketing, debt and predatory lending. In an attempt to give some guidance on finding the horizon, I introduced the idea of dialectic thinking, seeing concrete events tied to their opposites. The example used was mothers working too much. Seeking an antithesis Marissa suggested that it would be: mom’s not working so much. Uchembua said that you couldn’t have this dialectic without dealing with consumerism. “They are all connected.

Because that's what drives the damn thing. You want to go to work to make money so you can buy." This led Brent to ask how do we change "... this society of mass consumption." Camilla suggested that mom's want their children to have the best things. She added that there was a lot of competition to get stuff for kids. This led to some discussion of the pressures facing kids and the role parents could take in supporting children simply having fun.

The group reflected on two concepts that were brought up earlier, elaborating on their potential use within a proposed project. The first was to use parent teacher conferences as a springboard for developing parent discussion groups. These discussion groups would offer parents a forum to share and discuss problems they were having as parents raising children. The second concept was to explore volunteer adult groups of different ages that might be willing to work with kids in different contexts. Three groups emerged. One group was young adults interested in youth/social work professions, before they were tied down with families of their own. The other two were to recruit older adults with grown children, and retirees wanting to work with kids.

The dialogue shifted to project elements and issues that might evolve out of working directly within neighborhoods. One possible element was to try to use volunteers in some way to rekindle the influence that stay at home parents used to have on the neighborhood as a whole. The group discussed different elements of neighborhood building that group members had been involved in, included making a point of greeting new neighbors, participating in block clubs around crime and vigilance, and putting on block parties. It was pointed out that there seems to be a lot of complacency except where people are facing neighborhood problems.



Other potential project elements that surfaced were youth service learning projects, and tapping into the spirit of volunteerism some of these participants had experienced growing up playing and participating in community center activities. During this phase of the discussion, the idea of a paid summer youth program first emerged. Two models were discussed. One was a project that Brent had been involved in as a teenager, where he was paid to be a counselor in training at an inner city day camp. As part of the project, other kids were paid to work at local parks. The other model was Americorps where college age young adults obtain college scholarship money for participating in summer long volunteer projects.

Three other project issues arose toward the end of the session. Relying on community centers and parks and recreation locations and programming might not reach some of the people most in need of a project for kids. There was strong support for a recreational component to a project, where kids could have fun. There was also some discussion about what kind of work the kids might be involved in and it was agreed that at least some of it should be of value to both kids and adults, not just simply cleaning up trash.

I asked the group if they had any ideas for a project, and they quickly arrived at the concept of a paid summer youth program. Asked if they all wanted to get behind this as the potential project to be developed, they unanimously agreed. The group reflected on the process of action / reflection dialogue that they had just participated in. Some of the comments included the idea that the group seemed to be building trust, and that they were enjoying the ideas shared in dialogue. They developed an action step to be accomplished during the two weeks before the next session. The idea was to talk with neighbors, friends and family members, especially kids, to find out what kinds of work and

recreation activities would be of value to the neighborhood. Some people would try canvassing a small part of their neighborhood with a flyer inquiring about the same thing.

*Session 3 summary.*

Camilla, Marissa, Brent, and Lenny made up the group for this third session. Teresa and Uchembua were both absent. Beginning with the rough idea for a project, the group began to further refine the idea of a summer long paid youth program that mixed both work and recreation.

Several project elements emerged in the dialogue. This project should focus on youth who have limited or no recreational or employment opportunities during the summer months. The content of the projects should be developed at the neighborhood level, seeking input from both adults and youth in the community. A component of the project should be to reach out and communicate with all the households on a block through organized block clubs, or connecting with people willing to support the project by talking with their neighbors. Recruitment could include tapping into existing institutions such as student clubs from local schools, and truancy programs. There was a suggestion to collaborate with local police as well.

The next segment of dialogue focused on the work that kids might do, exposing a tension between what the community might want accomplished and what might motivate kids. This thinking led to linkages such as graffiti and tagging removal, and the creation of mural art, cleaning up after summer festivals, and participating in the planning and setup of those celebrations.

Some time was spent discussing the need to provide a great deal of direction to the target population for this project as many of them will not have had any work

experience. There was also more conversation about the different groups of adults who might provide this kind of direction as well as project leadership.

Towards the end of the session, there was a discussion about collaborating with existing organizations within a community. Brent introduced some literature off of the Search Institute website, a research group whose focus is on developing community building strategies.

The group wanted to develop a mission statement for the project, similar to the one found on the Search Institute's website. The mission they came up with was "To provide young adults with knowledge, self responsibility, and team cohesion, encouraging community involvement. There was interest in developing the rest of the project in the form of a grant proposal.

There was consensus among the four group members to meet one more time. I agreed to send out notes from the session, and find some grant writing templates for the next session. The group also set an action step to continue gaining feedback on the project from friends, family, and neighbors.

*Session 4 summary.*

Teresa joined Camilla, Marissa, Brent, and Lenny for this fourth session, Uchembua was absent. The group began by adopting a grant proposal template published by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (See Figure 10 in Appendix C). They decided to focus on the narrative aspect of the proposal, suspending any fiscal limitations.

Before starting, Teresa and Brent proposed using a Habitat for Humanity house construction program as one of the activities for this project. One of the benefits would be to offer some home construction skills and exposure to various skilled trades. Other

suggestions included boosting the perceived shortage adult male mentors for young boys, seeking activities that support eldercare nursing homes, and people with handicaps.

The group reiterated their goal of designing a two month long paid summer project for teenagers who do not have anything else to do. The dialogue focused on who should lead the project and what the ratio of adults to kids should be. It was decided that there should be one young adult leader for every four kids in the project. Volunteers could bring that ratio closer to one adult for every two teenagers. If the project were limited to 80 kids, it would mean 20 young adult student leaders would need to be situated, and at least 20 volunteers recruited.

Envisioning a mechanism for oversight and administration, the participants thought that a volunteer board of directors could hire an administrator with skills to organize and implement the project. The student leaders would be split into two groups, each with a different role. Four to eight of these students would be assigned as activity leaders, in charge of a particular aspect of the project, such as graffiti removal, mural construction, gardening, festival planning and cleanup and someone could be in charge of field trips. The rest of the students would be in charge of groups of five to eight teenagers that would then rotate through the activities. Volunteers could stay with a particular group of students as a mentor or work as a specialist with one particular activity.

The group felt there should be compensation for the administrator, the student leaders and the teenagers. The idea the group agreed to, was to offer the administrator a one-year position starting six months before the field season began. The three compensation schemes for the student leaders were to provide paid internships, various scholarships for college, and course credit from a collaborating college or university. The

teens would be paid monthly based on strict attendance, punctuality and acceptable behavior.

The group came up with various forms of evaluation at different times over the three hours of this session. One idea that was agreed to was to measure success through a rate of program completion of 90%. Some other ideas were to see if there was a drop in graffiti and tagging in the areas where the group had worked on removal and mural art. The group planned to solicit evaluations from the teens, student leaders, volunteers, parents, and neighborhood groups. Student records could be assessed to see if there were positive changes in truancy and academic success. Juvenile crime statistics could also be examined in some way to see if there was any positive impact within the project area.

Some of the goal statements that were developed during the latter part of the session attempting to address certain questions on the grant template are rough and often redundant. The community benefits from the project could be a cleaner environment, a more cohesive community by bringing together diverse people from multiple age groups, working together toward common goals that benefit their own communities. This project involves concerned citizens and parents working with local universities, community organization, and police to help youth to become better community citizens.

An additional component to the project was discussed and added late in the process. The idea was to work with the teens on questions and answers describing what they have been involved during the week. Parents and caring adults will be encouraged to ask these questions a few times a week to check in with the teenager participating in the project.

At the end of the session, I asked if and how the project had changed them. Some of their reflections can be found in the *Interpretive Description of Group Work* (see Appendix C)

### *Loss of the Middle Class*

#### *Envisioned Project.*

#### Project Mission

To create a mentoring program to help align responsible adults with children to help the children become responsible members of the community.

To create an organization that fosters greater community responsibility with local businesses, adult mentors and children in North Minneapolis.

To create through community action, a community standard of living that will provide food, shelter, healthcare, education, and fair and safe employment in a sustainable manner, managed with a high level of local participation.

#### Project summary:

[This summary is a loose compilation of the major ideas and themes that were developed over the course of the four sessions. This first part of the summary offers ideas that were agreed upon in principle at various times during the sessions but not in any final form. The section labeled “Other Ideas” were suggestions that were supported by several people and elicited no objection, but were not agreed to by everyone present at the time.]

This project combines a mentoring program that supports community responsibility with the added intension of helping local businesses develop community ties that will strengthen their connection to the neighborhoods they serve.

The mentoring program will focus on connecting adults with young people, ideally before they are faced with many of the difficult decisions teenagers face today.

The mentoring adults will come from inside the community as well as from outside. The mentors from within the community could be relatives, neighbors, friends, local business people or other volunteers. The Mentors from outside the neighborhood could be affiliated with business associations such as the Lions Club, employees of sponsoring corporations or other volunteers. The project will focus on activities and initiatives that are generated locally. One way to develop locally is to enlist the help of block coordinators who would volunteer to organize and oversee the kids from their own blocks.

The activities that mentors and mentees participate in together would be a mix of community service projects and subsidized outings to sporting events, museums, theaters or parks. The community service projects would be very informal, such as helping an elderly neighbor with lawn mowing, or cleaning out a basement, or perhaps something along the lines of building a dog house.

This project would also include a component that builds relationships with local businesses on several different levels. One way would be through seeking sponsorship and offering promotion and marketing opportunities through the organization. Through this relationship, the mentors and mentees would come to know the shop owners and shop employees building knowledge and understanding of one another. This growing relationship could help bridge local workers to these local businesses.

There would be some level of paid staff support to work on funding, coordinating events and project recruitment. The unpaid project participants themselves would accomplish the initial funding drive. A hierarchy of sponsorship was envisioned, looking to Federal and State grants at the top, with corporate grants next. Free and or reduced

price tickets would be solicited from the entertainment vendors, followed by local businesses providing food, tools, and equipment.

**Project scope:**

The project would start out small, working out of free space in two to four community centers within one neighborhood. The project might advertise broadly across the neighborhood in local newspapers, but restrict door to door flyering and block organizing to a limited radius around each of the community centers.

**Evaluation:**

Several ideas for program evaluation were suggested including program participation over time ( how many kids stay in the program for several years), the number of local businesses participating (growing in strength, or number), and trying to ascertain ways to determine if the community has benefited from the project in any ways.

**Other ideas:**

The participants would be actively supporting businesses that hire from within the community, and especially those that pay living wages and benefits. Under mentor recruitment, there was a suggestion that the project actively recruit from every corner of the neighborhood, including people who might be easily overlooked such as those without a home. One idea for activities could also include after school tutoring.

*Session 1 summary.*

Monty, Richard and Brennan all arrived early and helped set up the room, Brenda Demetrius and Rick arrived soon after the 1:00 start time. The introductions were informal, and a natural discussion developed about the impending closure of the plant. People were in various situations. Monte had taken a buyout package and returned as a temporary part time worker for a lower wage, Richard had an early retirement package,



and the rest had stayed with their original contract, hoping to reach retirement or be transferred to another plant.

The discussion wove together several themes, the loss of living wage jobs, the impact it would have on the local community, the loss of tax base. They also spoke about poor management practices and corporate irresponsibility to the community. The war in Iraq was also mentioned as drain on the middle class.

I reintroduced the idea of developing a project as a group, to address the loss of the middle class. They had all read a summary of the preconditions for dialogue, and confirmed that they understood them. I introduced the concept of praxis and the process of action / reflection. Using the initial discussion as an example, Richard articulated a reflective theme about job loss, poverty, and the loss of the middle class, which I wrote out on the whiteboard. The group decided to spend a half hour discussing this theme to see what ideas might emerge.

The ensuing dialogue was very intense and lasted for about an hour and fifteen minutes. One theme that surfaced was the link between individuals feeling responsibly connected to their communities has been severed and people have no real sense of partnership. There seems to be a culture of concern, but no meaningful action or follow through on the part of religious or secular institutions. There was a wide-ranging discussion about race in America that touched on the racially disproportionate incarceration rates, the legacy of slavery on employment, and the effect of the media perpetuating negative stereotypes. A heated discussion about low paying low skilled local jobs emerged. Demetrius, an active pro-union advocate was the lone defender of non-union jobs in fast food because they represented starter jobs for teens, and supplemental income jobs for retirees on social security. A final theme was that people who work many

hours in the day are less able to eat right, and tend to buy fast food. This seems to be leading to increases in diabetes and obesity.

After a short break, the codes placed around the conference table became the center of the dialogue. Several themes that emerged included the alarming rate of foreclosures occurring today with the distinct connotation that this could be anyone of us, and the impact of lower wages, particularly non-livable wages on a consumer driven economy. There was also some discussion about the connection between globally produced cheap consumer goods, as represented by Wal-Mart, and the loss of manufacturing jobs.

Near the end of the session, I introduced the idea of Heterotopia and visioning past what we perceived as obstacles, suspending our preconceptions about what is possible and looking toward a horizon of what Miles Horton called the “ought to be.” As the meeting came to a close, the group decided to focus on the horizon as an action step for the next session.

*Session 2 summary.*

Barbara, Brennan, Richard, Rick, and Monte made up the participants in this session, as Demetrius was absent. The discussion began informally, as not everyone had arrived on time. Several themes on the topic of k-12 education surfaced in this first part of the session including the political nature of school boards and the confusing structure of having non-educators in charge of education. The large metro area urban and suburban school districts recruit nationally for Superintendents, seemingly to cut budgets. They get very high compensation, and then end up leaving after only a few years. There also seems to be an anti public education assault going on in this country which parallels the anti union sentiment building since the end of World War II.

At a natural stopping point, the group reflected on the process and content of the first session. Barbara said that it had inspired her to take steps to become active at a local elementary school, and Rick spoke about how there was a lot of hope in the group. The two main ideas suggested for possible project topics in the first session were recounted, a mentoring program, and developing living wage jobs in the community. Rick offered a third thread of responsible tax spending; with the meaning being to shift some government resources away from subsidizing multinational corporations toward investment in community centered businesses.

Brennan's question "How do we change attitudes?" surfaced a tension between a community changing its own patterns from within, and people coming in from outside to facilitate change. Within the context of a mentoring program, this tension played out in a dialogue about who the potential mentors should be. There was serious discussion around the subject of people with Felony convictions, whether they had hurt someone leading to a conviction, or if they had been out of the court system for a long time without reoccurrence. Some felt that a family friend, an aunt or an uncle, or an estranged parent could be part of a program where there were community-centered activities and then perhaps tickets available for a football game or passes to the Science Museum. There were suggestions to bring in business people and others' with some power from the outside and connect them with kids and concerned adults from within the community. This could create greater potential for systemic change at various levels of government.

The dialogue shifted to other themes that included another look at the negative economic effects the loss of middle class purchasing power is having on businesses, the unsustainable and disastrous effects of producing ethanol from food staples such as corn, and a conversation about non-locally produced goods including the food we eat. After a

ten-minute break, we regrouped to reflect on the dialogue and develop action steps for the rest of the session. The reflection process helped to articulate connections that had been implied in earlier dialogue, that a group supporting a mentorship project could also be engaged in community building and promoting living wage jobs in a community.

There was a move to create a mission statement or a statement of purpose for such a project. What followed was a brainstorming session driven by several questions about what such a project might look like. A couple of models for the community centered jobs program were developed. The most promising of these was a vision of a local sandwich shop providing food and gaining patronage through a relationship with the project. Other aspects of this relationship could be developed as well, including advertising in exchange for sponsorship, and a connection to after school jobs for the kids in the project. Monte suggested the words “making this community a better place socially, economically, ...politically stable, and sustainable.” as a start to a mission statement with different elements of the proposed project embedded in the words.

Questions directed at what age the target population should be, pushed the brainstorming in another direction. The discussion continued with several participants describing mentoring experiences they had participated in or knew of. Some of these programs focused on elementary aged children, others were designed for high school age or older. There was a tacit consensus to try to reach kids who were younger, before they might be getting into situations where they could make bad choices that would get them into serious trouble. Another tension arose between the idea that a mentorship program should be focused on fun (be very informal and not meet every week) and a program that kept kids very busy with after school tutoring and structured weekend activities.

There were a couple possible operational ideas that emerged through dialogue toward the end of the session. One that everyone agreed to was to have paid staff involved in organizing and implementing the project. The other was less resolved, and focused on whether there should be a base of operations within one space like a specific community center, or have meeting places dispersed across several parts of a neighborhood.

*Session 3 summary.*

Brennan, Demetrius, Monte, Richard and Rick made up the group for this session. Barbara was absent. This session differed considerably from the first two meetings in several ways. There was a great deal of tension at times between Demetrius and several other participants as he tried to articulate his concerns about many aspects of the proposed project as it had been developed thus far. He was absent from the second session where the mentoring component began to take shape. This tension pulled the dialogue into a deconstruction process of questioning, rather than toward project construction as had been the general trend. Brennan moved himself into the position of an unofficial facilitator without any agreement or disagreement on the part of the group, and acted as antagonist to Demetrius' resistance and need to be heard.

After a brief discussion about the newest rumors concerning the assembly plant's future, the group reflected on the three components that had been developed in the previous session, as well as the beginnings of a mission statement. A mentorship program linking kids from within a community to adults from their neighborhoods or from the greater community was left intentionally undefined. The possibility remained that relatives, estranged parents, family friends, and not just strangers could be encouraged by this program to connect with kids.

The group was still interested in the potential project connecting with local businesses in both a sponsorship / patronage relationship and as a way to promote employment connections between local providers of goods and services, and the people within neighborhoods they serve. One focus would be on entry-level jobs for teens, and part time jobs for seniors. The other would be on living wage jobs for adults in the context of sustainable employment from within a neighborhood. The third element was advocating for resources from local, state, and federal levels of governments that would stimulate sustainable living wage jobs within the neighborhoods being served.

Several members of the group began framing the problems they saw plaguing North Minneapolis, the lack of jobs, economic disparity, and a lack of political participation. As well, in Brennan's words there are also "disenfranchised families resulting in disconnected family unions". Demetrius questioned the political participation statement, eventually pushing for the idea of voter apathy which he suggested was participation but without benefit. This discussion ranged over several elements of political participation, including the divisiveness of single issue voting, and the disappointment people felt when they thought a candidate would work for their interests, but they don't.

Demetrius also objected to the general tone of framing North Minneapolis as a problem neighborhood. He felt that the media had chosen to cast the whole neighborhood in a bad light, even though most of the crime was concentrated in a small geographical part. He eventually pointed out that neighborhoods aren't bad, but they become destroyed economically. Several people pushed to reinsert the idea of economic disparity, and it stayed on the white board for the time being.

The ensuing discussion shifted to immigration. Several people suggested that inflows of both documented and undocumented workers not only compete with neighborhood residents for local part time service jobs, but also create a surplus of available low wage semi-skilled labor that industrial businesses can and do exploit. The group seemed to accept that this condition was a significant factor in influencing the loss of the middle class. Rick and Monte suggested that if local businesses developed relationships with their neighboring residents, then they might be more willing to hire from within the community, rather than recruiting cheap (though competent) labor from newly arrived people living in the broader metro area. As Monte put it, the idea was to use the project to build “greater community responsibility... on the part of local businesses...”

Connected to the idea of businesses exploiting immigrant populations, was the exportation of manufacturing jobs to places where greater profit could be garnered. There was an undercurrent within this discussion, that if there were too many demands made on industrial businesses in particular, that they would leave and go to another region of the US or some other part of the world. There was also some debate about the work ethic of teenagers, and younger people in the work force in general steering employers toward more motivated newly arrived workers.

Richard had been quietly taking in the discussion and had written a part of a mission statement. Working from his perspective that human rights include adequate housing, education, food and healthcare, he pushed for community action that developed some form of community standard of living that was sustainable and driven by a “high level of local participation”. Richards’s articulation of a mission was discussed and

generally well accepted. The group realized a bit later that these were indeed middle class characteristics that were being lost in many neighborhoods.

Demetrius returned to some of his earlier objections, and continued on with the idea that any project would have to start with parents and their relationship with their kids. He wove this into his perception of the welfare trap promoting single parent homes and his concern about the dismal state of foster-care in Minneapolis. He also objected to the idea that there needed to be incentives or a “carrot” in order for people to do the right thing. All the while Brennan, Richard and Monte took turns attempting to accommodate these new tensions into the framework that had been developed in the previous session.

Eventually Demetrius arrived at a comment on race which seemed to be at the very heart of his previous issues:

Until we ... talk about racial issues, bringing people together ... we're always going to have this problem ... between the rich and poor. Groups like this, groups bigger than this need to sit down and get it out.

Toward the end of the session, it became clear that the group was not far enough along to complete the task of envisioning a project. At one point Demetrius's questions were met with a chorus of “then what do we do?” There was some dialogue around the idea of being constructive, about feeling free to object, but then having the responsibility to offer alternatives. Everyone agreed that this would be a good posture to take from this point forward in the group work.

With little time left, I asked the group if they would be willing to meet one more time, and they readily accepted. We set the time for the fourth group session.



*Session 4 summary.*

Barbara was sick and unable to attend. The rest of the participants, Brennan, Demetrius, Monte, Richard and Rick began working on the goal statements that had been formulated during the prior meetings. The first read:

To create through community action, a community standard of living that will provide food, shelter, healthcare, education, and fair and safe employment in a sustainable manner, managed with a high level of local participation.

The second statement said “An organization that fosters greater community responsibility with local businesses, adult mentors and children in North Minneapolis.” A third statement was discarded right away, and the fourth eventually became the leading statement for the project and read “To create a mentoring program to help align responsible adults with children before they become irresponsible in order to foster a sense of community.”

There were several critiques of the first statement, most centering around the idea that it did not specifically outline what the project participants would actually be engaged in. Richard, who had authored the statement in the first place, suggested that it was too daunting to take on. The group did not want to abandon these human rights ideas, and eventually Rick came up with the notion that this statement reflected the “group ideology”.

The group focused on the fourth statement, altering it slightly to read “To create a mentoring program to help align responsible adults with children to help the children become responsible members of the community.” The sense was that this was a more positive way to describe the mentoring facet of the project, but left the corrective aspect in place.

The dialogue shifted to the recruitment of adult mentors for the project. Monte envisioned a mix of people, some from within the project area building self-sufficiency, and some from the outside bringing new perspectives. Richard felt strongly that everyone within the project area should be asked and offered a chance to participate. Monte suggested that it would be in the self-interest of those more fortunate to help break the cycle of poverty driven crime and violence that would inevitably be turned on them. Rick wanted business groups from the outside to volunteer with business groups from within the community.

These and other linkages could support children by exposing them to a set of soft skills (behaviors) and hard skills (technical training) that could help them become more employable in the future, as well as more effective community members. Demetrius brought up a model he remembered from many years back, where kids were paid a nominal amount of money to do some labor tied to community service, to attend school, and then to go on field trips. This model also included adult “coordinators” who lived on the blocks where the participating kids lived. Monte thought the project should include after school tutoring.

The scope of the project area was considered, and it was decided that it would be better to start small. An estimate that North Minneapolis covered roughly 800 square blocks startled several participants. A promotional approach emerged that included some marketing across the breadth of the neighborhood. Most of the effort to generate local participation would focus on the blocks near two to four community centers. These would be the areas where door-to-door flyer dropping, and block coordinator recruitment would take place.

The group discussed various forms of sponsorship from donations of food and or equipment from local businesses to corporate and Federal grants. If the group was going to follow through with this project, they would start by trying to tap into Federal grants, then corporate funds, then finally arrange local sponsorship.

Several ideas for project evaluation were brought up including tracking participation over years (how many kids stay with the program) and how many businesses join the project. A project like this could have different kinds of impact on a community including reductions in juvenile crime and high school drop out rates. There may be some way to measure these, or perhaps measure the behavior of the participants against community crime rates or school district completion averages.

The session ended with some observations about group dynamics and personal reflections about the process and the product of the group work (See Interpretive Description of Group Work in Appendix C).

## CHAPTER SIX

### Analysis

At the conclusion of these sessions on the overall production of the group work, I found myself caught up in the excitement that was palpable among the participants. Both groups of participants were quite pleased with the projects envisioned, and after checking with them individually, I came away with the feeling that each one would have felt comfortable being involved in the implementation of the projects. There was quite a bit of positive energy generated through the process of supportive collaboration. Barbara attributed her participation in a volunteer program at an elementary school to the feelings of empowerment she felt during the initial group work. Monte spoke several times of feeling compelled to “get involved” once he realized that through this process he had simply been a spectator in his neighborhood. Brent was already very active in his community, but felt that this form of dialogue, given the right type of facilitation, would work really well in his neighborhood, particularly with teenagers. Camilla thought it would be a way for people in neighborhoods to understand each other better, and Teresa echoed this thought. Lenny appreciated the diversity of the group. He felt it was important to simply share ideas, and that this process of sharing ideas was powerful. When the group work came to a conclusion, Brennan wanted to continue. Working with a group of friends, he carried forward several of the elements of the *Loss of the Middle Class* project, and wove them into another proposal for a North Minneapolis development project.

I was impressed with the level of civility that was present even when there was heated disagreement. During the third session of the *Loss of the Middle Class* group work, when Brennan and Demetrius were both close to feeling personally attacked, there

was enough trust already established so that they were both able to find a way to move on from the rancor.

I attributed some of the apparent success of the group work to the individual interviews that had taken place ahead of the group work. I felt that the participants were prepared to not only articulate their own views with greater confidence having spent time clarifying their thoughts, but they also seemed well prepared to listen to the ideas of others. Spending the time in the second interviews sharing the stories and issues (anonymously) that were used to construct the specific generative theme for their group, seemed to contribute to an atmosphere of familiarity with the variety of group member viewpoints. The development of the concepts for the codes in the second interview seemed to clarify thinking as well.

As I began to transcribe the group work dialogue from the recordings, a somewhat different picture of the process and group production surfaced. The first segment of this analysis addresses methodology-related issues that affected the project context. The issues analyzed are; 1) theme and code development, 2) group communication, 3) the role of facilitator, and 4) the time limitations of the group work. The second segment of this analysis focuses on the undercurrents of race and class which emerged within the data. At the end of the chapter there are some methodological suggestions in *Implications for future projects*.

#### *Theme and Code Development*

The themes represented in Chapter Four which were used to construct the two generative themes (*Loss of the Middle Class* and *Raising children: from a community perspective*) seem to have been appropriate as a place to begin the group work. There was a great deal of latitude on what kind of project could be envisioned and while very broad,

the generative themes elicited a great many realistic possibilities. While this seems to be a reasonable assumption, generative theme development is an area worth exploring further. In a discussion with my dissertation committee, Peter Rachleff brought up the interesting possibility that if the two main themes were merged, that is, that if the loss of the middle class were linked to the oncoming challenges facing their own children, then perhaps these autoworkers would not have been able to avoid facing their own situation (Personal communication, June 11, 2009).

Dialectic thinking, which Freire refers to as the theme and its opposite, was also lacking in the theme and code development process. The themes were pulled out of statements made in the first interviews, independently by the researcher. Transcripts contextualizing these statements were represented to the speakers during the second interviews to confirm their meaning. It was at this moment of member check, when an opportunity was lost to develop the themes into their full meaning. While Freire is clear about the demand for this dialectic relationship in developing themes, I overlooked the need to take the time to develop this step with the participants. It may have had a dramatic effect on this project in two ways. The first was to begin to develop dialectic thinking early on in the project. I introduced the concept of dialectic thinking to both groups during the second group meeting, but it was neither well developed nor implemented in any meaningful way. Dialectic thinking is not easily integrated into traditional problem solving models, and therefore quite unfamiliar to most people. Indeed, as a facilitator I should have developed new and better pedagogical means in order to build this skill in dialogue. The second effect may have been for the participants to surface limit situations out of their own concrete realities. If these limit situations were universal enough to be held in common among the other participants, it is possible that

the context of the envisioned projects could have remained within the concrete reality of the participants rather than in the un-rooted project of fixing “Others”.

The process of developing participant generated codes added to the overall clarification of ideas, which seemed to help engender participant confidence in the group work. As with the theme development, this process lends itself to a second opportunity for developing dialectic thinking. In many cases the process of code development incorporated the idea of an issue that was embedded in a contradiction, a contradiction being something that in reality was one way, but culturally understood to be something else. An example was Barbara standing as a professional on the street looking for white-collar work. There was Rick’s vision of a banker explaining how a savings and loan can support a community or Lenny’s picture of a young man, alone amidst a group of peers, needing his parents who are nowhere in sight. Contradictions are like exposing Kelner’s (2000) cracks and fissures. Dialectic understanding of these themes could create the penetration needed to apprehend the limit situation and envision possibility for change.

### *Communication*

In the initial reflection, I reported several positive aspects of the communication between the participants including civility, the positive energy of the group process, and the confidence each brought to the task of dialogue. Without diminishing these positive aspects, there are three issues that arose during the analysis that need to be addressed. These are the effect of absences and small group size, the voicing of silences, and the results of writing as a group.

The first issue is group size. The idea of keeping the groups small in size, between 5 and 8 participants each, seemed to be a manageable number to stimulate dialogue while giving everyone ample opportunity to participate. With the size of the groups at 6 each,

the balance of gender and race, was easily upset when one or two members were absent. Uchembua, Teresa, and Barbara were all absent multiple times, and the one time Demetrius was gone led to a very challenging follow-up session. These voices were missed in the dialogue. As pointed out by Freire and by standpoint advocates such as Donna Haraway and Nancy Naples, there is a danger in attributing too much of the “Other” in singular voices. As Haraway (2005) suggests, these voices are partial, locatable, and unpredictable and if they are active in their standpoint, responsible for their own knowledge. I no longer believe that a group size of 6 can adequately represent any community that hopes to privilege “knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination” (Haraway, 2005, p. 6).

There are many possible ways to resolve this issue beyond simply increasing the group size. One way that comes to mind immediately would be to have a variety of groups formed for different activities. Multiple small groups could become thematic resources. These ideas could be reported out in combined larger groups. Perhaps volunteer representatives could meet in smaller working groups to accomplish certain tasks and then report back to the larger group. In this scenario, group work would be much more adaptable to need and much more representative.

The second issue is voicing of silences. In any group, there is a dynamic interplay between the extroverts and the introverts, and between those who feel empowered to speak, and those who do not. This interplay must be mediated through forms of facilitation that attempt to amplify the marginalized voices, and to attribute some form of meaning to silence. As an experienced facilitator, I used visual cues, occasional direct questioning, and frequent one on one “check ins” to make sure that everyone had gotten a chance to air their ideas. I felt satisfied that I had created adequate space for even the



most reluctant voices to be heard. There was no indication from any member of either group that they weren't being heard. However after reviewing the transcripts of the group work, the asymmetry of voice was unacceptably clear. The domination of male voices became very apparent. Gender imbalance was unfortunately built into the project from the start, as representative of the overall plant population. Beginning with only four women to eight men, it should not have been surprising. Barbara and Teresa were both absent several times, further increasing the statistical imbalance. Teresa was the quintessential extrovert, having no trouble being heard in a group. Barbara was also quite vocal at times. Camilla and Marissa were both quiet for long stretches of the dialogues. Lenny and Richard were also quiet for long stretches of dialogue in their respective groups. Even after amplifying these muted voices as much as I could in the interpretive description, there are great stretches of time when several people are without words. As a facilitator I could simply attribute these silences to the way these people normally interact in a group like this, as it seemed quite natural at the time. It is up to the facilitator to overcome this challenge in responsible and respectful ways. Perhaps pairing people up to brainstorm together, or using a mix of small group strategies could enhance the opportunities to speak without the pressures of taking turns or being called upon in a group.

The third issue related to communication is writing as a group. Beyond note taking and reflections, I did not anticipate formal writing taking place in these groups. Both groups ended up writing various formal documents such as mission statements, and parts of proposals. Reflecting on the organic processes that evolved around writing, two suggestions surfaced. It takes a great deal of time to write as a group. Part of the process both groups took was laying out the important elements of what was being proposed.

Developing these elements and their relationship to one another in dialogue was an extremely important way of deriving language from the participants' own experiences. Some people wrote down ideas to share, while others tried to articulate ideas verbally while someone else wrote them down. All of these pieces were very important to capture in some way. However, the act of smoothing them out into legible sentences and the crafting process of writing did not seem to work well in several instances. Depending on who was writing at the time, it was inevitable that important words were dropped. When Marissa was word processing on a laptop at the end of the fourth session of the *Raising Children: from a community perspective* group, it was truly amazing how much she was filtering out as she typed. I listened to the dialogue swirling around her while reading the parts that actually made it onto the page, some of which she simply inserted without ever saying the ideas out loud. I later adapted what she wrote to better reflect what had actually been discussed. With the other group, we spent 30 minutes "crafting" a two and a half line string of unrelated words together. After this, they seemed to realize how difficult it was to write in a group, and they allowed me to take the elements that were named in bits and pieces and later, construct sentences and offer a fairly finished set of sentences back to them. They were able to read them in the time between sessions, and there was time to discuss them as a group. It seemed as though this was a much better use of the group's time.

### *The Role of Facilitator*

There were three roles designed for the researcher within the methods proposed in this dissertation. The roles of investigator and co-learner were well integrated into this study. The capturing and retelling of what took place, and the openness to allow the unanticipated to unfold seem to have been accomplished reasonably well. The role of

facilitator, in contrast, was not well developed within the context of this study. The two key components of problem posing and reflection were wanting in better facilitation.

Problem posing is an essential part of dialogue. Questioning assumptions, interrogating common sense, and pushing the dialogue in the direction of critical thinking are facilitation demands that Freire was reportedly quite skilled at. As a facilitator, I was more comfortable gently problem posing in the one on one in the interviews. I have found it less confrontational to question assumptions in these more private settings. For the most part, I simply kept things moving along, helping to bring the group back on task when it seemed they had strayed.

The tensions between investigator, co-learner, and facilitator were resolved in a way that left the facilitation weak. I was much more of an observer, even a cheerleader at times, choosing to be supportive and nondirective rather than leave much of an imprint. I feel that this role was too passive to move either group out of the realm of everyday learning (see Figure 1). Problem posing has the potential to insert a moment of reflection that transforms the meaning schemes of everyday learning into something new, with the possibility to change perspective (Mezirow, 1991). The act of intentionally reflecting was also not well facilitated. Freire's interpretation of praxis, the unity of action and reflection, was not realized during the periods designated for group reflection. Reflection was most often a restating of what had taken place, and action was simply a decision about what to talk about next.

#### *Time Limitations*

The time dimensions of this study were developed around two major factors. Respecting the time of the volunteers in this venture, I was worried that if I built too many hours into the framework that it could severely limit the pool of participants willing

and able to commit to the project. Three hours of interview time and three three-hour group sessions for a total of twelve hours seemed reasonable. As well, with up to 16 participants to interview, including transcription and theme development needing to take place in a timely fashion, it was as ambitious as I could envision handling. The interviews seemed to be paced well, and generated a great deal of data to work with. The pace of the group work seemed very natural over the first two and one half sessions. As the arbitrary ending neared, it became clear that three sessions were inadequate. While some aspects of the group vision were brought to a conclusion at the end of the additional fourth session, the process was rushed compromising some of the natural consensus that had grown out of earlier dialogue.

I had intimated at the outset of the project, that if the participants chose to go beyond three sessions of group work that I would be willing to continue as well. Both groups easily committed to a fourth session, which suggests that, a more intentionally open-ended time frame might be acceptable at the outset. I also have the impression that if the group engaged in a project centered on their own lived experiences, tackling a limit situation with personal impact, that commitment to implementing aspects of such a project could reduce the need for a finite timeframe for many participants.

#### *Project Context and Undercurrents of Race and Class*

Both projects, while developed independently of one another, and different in many ways, were amazingly similar in both context and target populations. Both groups chose to situate their projects in North Minneapolis, which has a reputation for being the poorest, most dysfunctional, and desperate neighborhood in the Metropolitan area. It is important to point out that no member of either group lives in this neighborhood. Aside from two of the participants who live in adjacent suburbs of North Minneapolis, no one

mentioned traveling into the area for any reason. One participant did point out that his friend who lives in “North” was very frightened in his current living situation and that this one person’s situation was generalized to make up a great deal of that participant’s perceptions of the neighborhood. Another group member complained that the various mainstream media constantly cast North Minneapolis in such an unrealistically bad light. For people who had not visited the neighborhood, it seemed as though the media had shaded the group members’ perceptions. There seemed to be a sense that these projects of hope could thrive in a place where it was assumed that there was none.

While connections between local economy, employment opportunity, and poverty were well established within each of the dialogues, both groups essentially ignored the lack of available jobs in “North”. Each project’s main focus was on changing the attitudes of the target population in order to make them more employable by creating a competitive edge over other applicants. In other words, the projects focus on changing individuals, rather than changing the economic conditions (such as job creation). One reason for this attitudinal approach could have been that envisioning change in the material conditions of a neighborhood seemed to be too daunting. There was a sense of hopelessness when bumping up against macroeconomics. These feelings are consistent with those outlined in Douglas Kelner’s (2000) vision of globalization as discussed in Chapter One (p. 17). Seeing the macroeconomic level as multivalent and highly complex, Kelner has hope for projects that can penetrate the cracks and fissures that are found at the level of people’s experiences, at the grassroots. What seems more likely in the case of these projects is that rather than penetrating cracks and fissures to break them apart, they are simply cohabitating the space, trying to take advantage of the gaps created by these economic tears and rents.

As I described in Chapter One, Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) described the “ambivalents,” as a group symbolizing people who find themselves highly invested in companies unable to take advantage of changing markets, and slowly deteriorating. The ambivalent group tends to adapt when the capitalist classes are in ascendancy and join strikes and marches when there are strong adversarial movements. This particular group of Autoworkers in my study seem to fit the ambivalent model, being active but without a sense of power to penetrate, willing to participate but with unclear self-interests. Similarly, this group should be of interest to Hardt and Negri’s (2004) interpretation of the “multitudes,” both for their willingness to participate, and for the potentially unclear direction their participation may take.

This limitation of the group projects, suggests that there is a serious need to link the microcosm of these participants to the communities of desperation they seek to help, in some essential way. Two challenges to this linkage for this group of autoworkers were that as a group they lived in middle class settings and in widely disparate communities across the metropolitan thresholds of urban, suburban and rural life. Insulated from the communities they seek to “help” both socio-economically and physically, they are too removed from the knowledges and voices that could speak to the desperation they wish to ameliorate.

An undercurrent to the contexts of these projects is that they are racially charged. The target population singled out for “help” in these two projects is “youth” from North Minneapolis. Implied, but unnamed and virtually un-critiqued, they aimed at a segment of the young population, specifically adolescent black males. The possibility that both projects, aimed at some dimension of poverty, innocently end up targeting the same

group seems almost unimaginable. To simply name them as racist projects, however, oversimplifies their inception.

My inclination was to leave these undercurrents exposed, but un-critiqued in this analysis. As a white, middleclass male, I have found it quite difficult to confront racism from non-white perspectives, preferring to remain active in the terrains that I am familiar with, that of whiteness and white supremacy. In a fascinating discussion with my dissertation committee I was encouraged to critique several of the threads of race and class that may have impacted the construction of these projects. Guided by this discussion, this critique centers on boundaries that separate self and “Other” and how perceptions of race and class contour constructions of “Others” in different ways with different groups.

On a broad level, self and “Other” are separated by class interests that mark a potential political and economic boundary between these autoworkers and other semiskilled and non-skilled workers in the metropolitan area. The participants clearly recognize their class location and their own privileged economic position within the primary labor market. Sometimes referred to as the labor aristocracy, this group has garnered living wages that have lifted many up into middle class lifestyles, though often requiring only a willingness to enter into a subordinate and grueling work environment. The economic barriers that remain at the center of labor struggle around the world, the fight for living wages, basic healthcare, affordable housing, and nutrition which may have faced many of these autoworkers at one point in their lives, are now substantially removed. Once securely located within this system, worker interests move to the maintenance of this position, focusing on issues such as survival of the relentless pace, the long hours with little room for personal and family interruptions, and trying to remain

healthy enough to continue. The connection between self-interest and labor struggle solidarity seem to be quite challenged, and unaligned in recent decades. Yet even in the face of an impending plant closing, the participants in this study seem to have trouble positioning their own potential loss of middle class standing within the broader context of anti-globalization labor movements. Locating themselves among the U.S. middle class, not only are their perceived economic interests different from other labor groups, but their connections to their own workplace, extended families, neighborhoods and communities of faith, all seem lack effective agency leaving them powerless to confront the loss of the middle class and the hope for next generations to prosper.

This broad look at the effect of class location on the border between self and “Other” is a valuable starting point, but it does not account for the specific way that antagonisms develop in opposition to different groups of “Others” - immigrant groups, foreign labor situated in outside of the country, and the “Others” they wish to help. Anti-immigration sentiment, and ethnic antagonisms emerged in dialogue throughout the interviews and group work segments of this study. One participant complained about Mexican cheap labor filling unskilled jobs that should go to local high school kids, and retirees looking to supplement their incomes. The implication was that these were the jobs that young African American workers need, to gain experience in the workforce. These entry level jobs get them inside the world of work as opposed to remaining on the periphery, as is the case with so many who find themselves in a state of structural unemployment. He was also bitter about the rise of Hispanic small businesses along Lake Street, among neighborhoods with high percentages of Black residents, which he felt were excluding local African American’s in favor of Latin American labor. Another participant complained about what she perceived as preferential advocacy for newly



arrived immigrants, an advocacy that she hasn't experienced as a native born African American female. Yet another participant made the rather flip argument that the U.S. should annex Mexico apparently in order to gain the lost tax revenue from Maquila corridor multinationals along the border, and to give the U.S. more control over noncompetitive labor arrangements. Along a parallel line of thinking, another group member felt the flow of cheap labor should be stopped by stricter immigration enforcement, and the development of punitive taxes on corporations that move off shore. Even though this participant was raised in rural Mexico she sees herself as a part of a U.S. under siege from south of the border.

These antagonistic voices, opposed to current immigration and free trade practices, were some of the strongest and come from minority participants in this study. My sense is that these are not simple constructions of 'Others', but a mixture of seeing deeply into the realities of the current U.S. domestic economic system, the legacies of historical caste and apartheid structures, and perhaps some hegemonic inscription of whiteness that comes with the baggage of aspiring to and maintaining middle class status in the U.S.

Zeus Leonardo, a Professor in the Department of Education at the University of California at Berkley, suggested that there were multiple locations of "Others" surfacing within various data points across the interviews and group work in this study. He recommended the concept of "Split Labor" theory as articulated by Edna Bonacich as one reference for explaining antagonisms within different labor groups (Z. Leonardo, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

In her book chapter entitled *A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The split labor market*, Bonacich (2005) outlines two fundamental themes that affect labor relations, and

two distinct patterns of antagonisms which emerge as responses to these relations. The two themes are, that business interests follow profit regardless of the ethnic/racial politics that might otherwise influence hiring decisions, and that there is a real conflict of interests between high paid labor and lower paid labor culminating in patterns of antagonistic relations contoured by historical and political factors.

One conclusion she draws from her data is that anti-union sentiment and racism within the business community does not appear to affect labor price. Businesses in the long run simply seek the most profitable labor arrangement in the same way water inevitably finds its way to the lowest ground. Bonacich (2005) suggests that class is the primary antagonistic factor, not ethnicity. If living conditions are relatively equal within labor populations, the theory suggests that there would be no basis for split labor and therefore ethnic antagonisms would not emerge within the economic sphere. However, when there is a substantial difference among the living conditions of different groups of potential labor, it limits company's hiring practice. Poorer workers will enter into labor agreements for different reasons and ultimately for lower wages than those traditionally employed, which poses a very real threat to existing wage prices. Thus, with the split labor, the tensions fall between the three groups she names employers, higher paid labor, and cheap labor.

How these tensions play out depends on the power arrangements between these three groups. Within a fairly closed system, political power often plays out in the maintenance of split labor practices. This situation is what Bonacich calls caste, or where an *exclusive* labor arrangement is made, limiting entry into preferred jobs in some way. The trade union movement in Europe is a classic example, with apprenticeships doled out among successive generations of family and friends. This is labor aristocracy at its most

visible. Employers have often worked together to break this political hold, by searching for extremely asymmetrical labor arrangements outside the local labor region that they can exploit through import. If the traditional labor pool is politically weak, this importation can be swift and staggering.

In the U.S., caste systems were set up early on with the importation of indentured servants, and then more institutionally with the development of slavery. Drawing from Bonacich's (2005) framework, it appears that local workers tolerated slavery because the cheap labor was expanding in new labor sector industries (such as large scale plantation agriculture) and there was not the political strength to resist in these early capitalist relations. Caste does not depend upon a labor group being indentured, however, and as slavery ended, new political barriers were erected to make sure that higher paid labor was able to keep its wage advantage even if the same work was being accomplished. Exclusive labor arrangements have been very visible at times, as in the segregated Jim Crow post slavery period that included institutions such as the military at least until the end of WW II, and in the gender driven wage differentials that persist today in this country.

Business tolerates exclusive labor arrangements and pressure to increase wages only as long as there is political efficacy among the higher paid workers. These arrangements have played out very differently across various regions of the country and within distinct sectors of the economy. Both the east and west coasts of the U.S. have experienced waves of business-subsidized immigration that have been met with various forms of political reaction on the part of higher paid labor. In cases where cheap labor is directed at job replacement, the posture of local labor tends toward *exclusion*, that is, keeping cheap labor out of the labor/ business arrangement completely. Unskilled labor

in the U.S. has been traditionally unorganized and weak politically. Typically they are unable to resist the importation of cheap labor. When the new competition bumps up against the higher paid skilled trades and the small merchant class, however, it stimulates a reaction that is much more organized and politically powerful than the efforts of unskilled labor. Indeed, the political power and organization of higher paid labor often ascends in this environment, as do the antagonisms that are based on this class reaction (Bonacich 2005).

A contemporary view of domestic caste exclusivity and the reactionary politics aimed at immigration exclusion provide some insight into the varying ways that self and “Others” are constructed in this project. The paternalistic caste relations that have been the hallmark of white supremacy in the U.S., cutting along white and black lines, construct an “Other” that is often feared but lives under the shadow of centuries of economic control. One possible explanation for situating liberal projects in North Minneapolis could be that helping some of these young structurally unemployed black males to become more competitive is that they are not perceived as a threat to those in the higher paid primary labor market.

The antagonistic politics of exclusion in the case of undocumented Latino/Latina’s also seems to hold to Bonacich’s (2005) theory of split labor. While these new immigrants have filled substandard wage and unskilled jobs such as domestic help and seasonal agricultural labor, there has been little political pushback. In recent decades, underpaid Latino/Latina labor has begun to infiltrate the margins of more skilled trades in industries such as meatpacking and construction. As these populations increased, small merchant projects such as restaurants and grocery stores also followed. These are the boundaries where immigrants bump up against more politically organized resistance. In

addition, with the maturing globalized industrial complex, imports produced with cheaper labor are no longer restrained with exclusionary tariffs that help to keep higher paid local labor competitive. With the rise of multinational corporations and the ensuing politics of “free trade”, ethnic antagonisms have developed even without the physical presence of labor. It seems reasonable to view anti-China antagonisms in this light.

Focusing on “youth” in North Minneapolis might also be an expression of these autoworkers’ waning privileged position. Ignoring the impending catastrophe, these autoworkers might see themselves as not in need of help, but able and willing to help “Others.” Peter Rachleff, Professor of History at Macalester College in Saint Paul, suggests that this group has had very little experience with collective action within the union. The militancy of strikes that characterized union agency in the 1940’s and 1950’s has diminished to a distant memory in the auto industry. As a result, people do not seem to feel ownership within the union and it is perceived as more of a third party in the autoworker/ industry relationship. He sums this sentiment up this way:

Not wanting to take on collective self help is a disturbing conclusion... but conveniently there is a space identified by the media and other institutions as a place to come and help others... [There is] an entire generation of folks that have not had the experience of significant collective struggle.

(P. Rachleff, personal communication June 11, 2009)

He further suggests that in order for these workers to define themselves differently, it may require undertaking some form of collective struggle and they do not have the experience or knowledge of where to begin (P. Rachleff, personal communication June 11, 2009). Both the move to economic independence and the lack of experience with collective struggle seems to position the potential power of collective self help beyond a myopic middle class vision that affects many of us in the U.S.

There appear to be culturally derived antagonisms in the construction of self and “Other” that are not explained by split labor forces, nor the maintenance of privileged position. One participant spoke candidly about how ancestral connections to slavery have persisted across subsequent generations in the form of hidden rituals. She pointed out that religious practices from Africa were often forbidden by slaveholders, requiring the construction of a sophisticated cultural mask. Her reference to hidden practices contrasts dramatically with what she sees as an offensive assault on her Christianity by veiled women and the open rituals of washing and prayer that have come with the Islam practiced by immigrants from Somalia and elsewhere. Another volunteer who did not end up participating in the group work, also spoke about what he felt was an erosion of U.S. patriotism brought on by an influx of large numbers of immigrant children in his suburban school district.

The construction of blackness as “Other” in the U.S., through the gauntlet of white supremacy, is a complex that mixes the paternalism of asymmetrical labor relations, the oppression of a skewed legal system, and the constant media portrayal of criminalization. As Zeus Leonardo suggests, the data from this dissertation research points to a construction of blackness that is criminalized, but very much American. While blackness poses its own set of cultural threats to whiteness, they are not perceived as being the same as those brought by foreign “Others” (Zeus Leonardo, personal communication, June 11, 2009). The paternalistic nature of the projects envisioned by these autoworkers focus attention on young black males before they are old enough to become dangerous. The expressed purpose of mentoring and summer jobs is to make this group more employable, ostensibly to displace foreign born workers that commute into neighborhood jobs from surrounding areas.

From a methodological viewpoint, there were several problematic voicings concerning race within the group dialogue that were left un-interrogated. Under more skilled and aggressive problem posing, these voicings could have served as sites of inquiry that may have helped to expose the racial undercurrents of the proposed projects. Only one person in either group challenged the tone and context of a project from a perspective of prejudice. During the third group session of the theme *Loss of the Middle Class*, he based his arguments first on his feeling that the problems of the neighborhood were economic and not attitudinal, then his skepticism about the agenda of mentoring, and finally racism surfaced as the fundamental challenge facing not only North Minneapolis but also the breadth of the US. While his critiques had little effect on the substance of the articulated project, the dialogue revealed the potential for diverse standpoint to contour hegemonic discourse.

One possible remedy, from a methodological perspective, would be to situate the project development physically within the specific community, and to include a wide representation of voices from that community to address the issues of that community. A multi-union organizing project in Stamford Connecticut is one illuminating example of how to build a community-based project. This project focused on developing a community-centered project based on the needs of newly organized low-wage workers (Delp, Outman-Kramer, Schurman, Wong, 2002; McAleve, 2003). Attempting to begin to gain first contracts for a group of city workers, and a group of nursing home workers, meetings were held with both groups exploring the structures of power that would impede or could help the organizing effort. These meetings uncovered several fundamental issues within these two communities that were as essential as wage and benefit concerns. Skyrocketing housing costs and the immanent destruction of affordable

housing units was at a crisis stage for these workers. As well, the deterioration of the schools in low-income areas of the city was near collapse. By tapping into the knowledges of these workers, the organizers were able to gain a tremendous insight into the workings of city government, and also began to understand that alliances with union members' faith communities could be of immediate help. The processes that privileged these knowledges also engendered leadership from within these communities, building capacity for the movement. These efforts to organize in community were not only successful in gaining first contracts for these workers, but also in protecting affordable housing stock and gaining political footholds in both the school district and city council.

The expressions of antagonisms along the borders of self and "Others" in this study are woven tightly into the fabric of U.S. economic and cultural histories. There are several strategic methodologies that can help to begin to surface these historical patterns. Collectively these methodologies could be grouped into a set of pedagogical practices that I am calling politicization. As described Chapter Two and in the conclusions section of this dissertation, the political elements of a Freirean dialogue begin with praxis, a simultaneous interplay between reflection and action which is political. The main methodological component driving politicization is the act of problem posing. I am proposing that problematizing historical patterns can be greatly enhanced by centering the dialogue deeply within the specific context the group wishes to ameliorate and by connecting ones own position to this context. In this way, participant perceptions of self-interest become politicized as part of the dialogue, helping to keep the group from straying to an abstract position of helping "Others" which occurred in these liberal projects.



### *Implications for Future Projects*

During the synthesis of the theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation, two essential concepts surfaced. The first was that developing themes and their opposites out of the lived experiences of the participants should yield fertile ground for the apprehension of limit situations that have immediate meaning for the participants. The second followed the logic of standpoint epistemologies; that if these pedagogical endeavors are situated within contexts of oppression with voices of the oppressed well represented as sites of inquiry, they would yield a much greater opportunity for surfacing organic critical theory than would participants from remote locations within the middle class. I believe that while these two statements are still correct, they are both incomplete. Before the analysis of this study, the natural extension of these two ideas would have led to a simple reintroduction of this project framework deeper into a context of oppression. The complex relations of domination/oppression require the intentional application of the political elements of praxis. This demand alters the locus of the political from serendipity toward intentionality. There are several implications for future projects that emerge from this shift.

One essential move is to develop understandings and strategies that initiate dialectic learning/teaching from the start. Theme development will take longer, and probably produce fewer themes, but in a dialectic form they will be much more useful. It is unclear whether one-on-one interviews will be the right context for dialectic theme development. It may be better situated in facilitated small groups. Intuitively, I sense that code development should take place in small groups as well. Teaming up in groups of two or three could enhance the creativity and content of the codes.

Variations in group size and focus will also be important. Some small group work could be very short term, such as breaking up for brainstorming as a way to more equally amplify all voices. Some small groups might be more permanent work groups in charge of some form of political action or group function such as writing notes or letters. If potential projects are to be sustainable, there will have to be broad community support, which will mean consideration of democratic forms of networking, coalition building, and decision making. The variety of purposes for meetings at a more regional level could drastically alter the size and shape of groups.

One aspect of democracy that will have to be addressed is the accommodation of dissent. In the context of this dissertation study, a pattern arose that is familiar to anyone who has spent time with informal consensus decision making. One objection can derail a proposition that may be supported by the majority. Democratic processes such as decision-making, and ways of listening and speaking will have to become more explicit.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Conclusions

The escalating crisis in capitalist relations around the world demands a variety of responses that unmask the confusing structures that perpetuate asymmetrical power relations, while reframing what is truly in the interests of the majority of people. Industrial unions in the U.S. have at times aspired to such an advocacy role, but currently offer little resistance to the loss of living wage jobs. At the grass roots level, there have been promising projects of resistance to globalization growing out of the fields of Popular Education, Participant Research and Critical Pedagogy. Taking a community centered approach, these projects attempt to amplify the voices of those most affected by the failing economy, by implementing strategies based on egalitarian and democratic principles stimulating an organically developed critical theory. This dissertation study is an exploration into developing social change projects based on the work of Paulo Freire and informed by other voices within the field of Critical Pedagogy and related traditions. Working with 16 volunteer autoworkers from an assembly plant located in the Midwest of the U.S., this research examines their issues, themes and group process leading to visions of small scale social change. Two themes, *The loss of the middle class*, and *Raising Children: from a community perspective*, emerged from one-on-one interviews, and became the generative beginnings for the group work. The group production was considered a success by the participants, developed out of consensus and culminating in envisioned projects potent with possibility for actual implementation. However, analysis of the process and content of the group work revealed several important weaknesses with the way in which the group work was facilitated, particularly in the lack of well developed dialectic reasoning and problem posing in dialogue. The results suggest a lack

of politicization engendering a weak form of praxis, allowing the participants to move from their own concrete realities to an abstract position of helping “Others”.

*The Trap of Liberal Projects*

In the forward of Paulo Freire’s posthumously published book *The Pedagogy of Indignation* (2004), Donaldo Macedo articulates a challenge to all educators. He implores us to see liberal projects through the lens of oppression. In this light, we can begin to understand that good intentions must undergo a metamorphosis that changes the very essence of a paternalistic giver/receiver relationship. We must stop developing pedagogies of the disenfranchised, which view the oppressed as somehow deficient. This thinking drives projects into the teeth of existing power relations and legitimizes oppression. We must instead validate the experience of oppression through human relations, and learn as cultural workers to struggle to end oppression of all kinds. These human relations involve a social praxis that requires political action. (pp. xxii-xxiii).

Macedo’s ideas come from the heart of Freire’s pedagogical philosophy as did the theoretical underpinnings for this dissertation study. The volunteer participants, all active or newly retired autoworkers, accepted the challenge to come together in dialogue, and to create a vision for social change generated from their own experiences. While the process was considered a success by everyone who participated, the projects envisioned fit Macedo’s description of well meaning paternalism. In some way, the foci of these projects became uncoupled from the participants’ own concrete reality to another location.

Developing and implementing a principled approach to dialogue, informed by the work of Freire and others, holds the promise of emancipatory potential, generated out of the lived experiences of the participants, transformed by the continuous action/reflection

of political praxis. Two of the most well known elements of Paulo Freire's theoretical construction of dialogue are the notion of "banking education," and the idea that "the content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (2000, p.95). Banking education is the education of oppression, the hegemonic narrative of the dominant ideology. As the antidote to banking education, liberal readings of Freire tend to emphasize the process of participant-centered organic knowledge construction in dialogue. For Freire, however, the antithesis to banking education is problem posing in dialogue, that is, the problematizing of the participants' understandings and perceptions of both the concrete material basis of their world and the subjective cultural, social constructions inexorably linked to this basis.

Explicitly establishing the dialectic link between banking and problem posing is fundamental to the shift toward politicization. Inserting these political elements is essential in the move toward a clearer and critical understanding of the participant's own experiences. Freire holds that this self critical activity, of surfacing experiences, and understandings of those experiences, occurs in dialogue. He feels that this clearer apprehension of subjectivities can lead to a better understanding of forces which contest the material object of their lives (Freire 2002 p.13). Staying in the realm of experience does not in and of itself stimulate the critical/political action to penetrate the subjectivities enough so as to act upon the material object of their reality. What is required is intentional politicization in dialogue.

There is a seemingly natural tension in group dialogue, between an organic knowledge construction that is generated out of the lived experiences of the participants, and an agenda which attempts to problematize the participants' perceptions of these experiences while linking them to broader critiques of power which must be inserted into

the dialogue in some way. The tendency to see the facilitator's direction and intervention as an extension of "banking" can lead to the privileging of participant-centered voice and the minimization of problem posing. I suggest that this tendency can easily create a series of de-politicizing currents in dialogue, which limits its emancipatory potential and leads to pedagogical projects that reify dominant discourse and the status quo of power relations. In reviewing the theoretical underpinnings of this study and revisiting several sources, it became clear that what were missing in the dialogic practices implemented in both the interviews and the group work were political elements.

#### *The Case for Politicization*

This conclusion chapter is focused on five related concepts that help construct a case for deliberately inserting political elements into dialogic process. They are (a) *The critical understanding of history*, (b) *Critical reflection as political action*, (c) *Facilitation as a political act*, (d) *Resolving the tensions between organic knowledge and inserting outside knowledge in dialogue*, and (e) *Developing political pedagogic interventions*.

#### *The Critical Understanding of History*

The long list of themes developed within this study, both in the interviews and the group discussions, were generated out of the participants' perceptions of their own history. Appearing to stretch across social, economic, and political realms, these historical contexts, no matter how nostalgic or mediated by hegemonic influence, lent both a hopeful potential that things could again become better, as well as a palpable sense of urgency at how far, as a country, we have gone in the wrong direction. These historical contexts tended to be intergenerational in nature, positioning these participants in

between the older generations of parents and grandparents, and the younger generations of children and grandchildren.

The large contrasts perceived across generations left these participants with the distinct impression that the generations to follow them are at risk of not realizing the same generous material improvements that have marched along since the end of the Great Depression. There was also an undercurrent of fear that the escalating economic chaos in this country could in fact overcome their own futures. For those without the security of a pension, there was a feeling of being on the edge of a cliff, only a few steps from losing their position in the middle class. For those with some pension security established, there was a tacit fear that industrial collapse could wipe away this hard earned retirement income and push them toward poverty as well.

This cliff represents a subset of these broad themes about economic discord. These participants clearly grasped the increasing chasm between the wealthy and the poor in the US. To their credit, there was surprisingly little blaming the victim in their critique of the current situation. The major factors identified were corporate greed, corruption of democracy and political institutions, the corporate/consumer interests of popular media, and peoples' unconscious collusion with the consumer economy. Unfortunately, there was a disconnection between the relative clarity with which these themes were apprehended, and the actions that were envisioned as projects to respond to them.

One possible reason that Freire suggests this could happen is that many people misunderstand the critical nature of history. I think that this is particularly relevant within the realm of politics in the context of this study. While many of these participants were active in support of candidates and voting, there was an undercurrent of mysticism shrouding the political process. The results of the process could become demystified over

time, but it was unclear to these participants, if anything could truly affect the present politics. Voting, candidate advocacy, and supporting lobbying groups were all undertaken with a subtle sense of desperation. The future seemed to hold little promise for contestation; just the vague hope that enough people would finally see that things needed to change. Historicizing the political, particularly weaving the past into construction of the present and the contestation of a changeable future, stands out as an important pedagogical component for future projects.

Discussing political literacy in his book *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation* (1985), Freire uses a dialectic approach to political literacy, beginning with political illiteracy. Embedded in the non-critical thinking of ingenious curiosity “One of the political illiterates tendencies is to escape concrete reality- a way of rejecting it- by losing himself or herself in abstract visions of the world.” An outgrowth of this abstraction is to consider the present as “something to be normalized; whereas the future, as a repetition of the present, becomes the maintenance of the status quo.” Another product of abstraction is to see the future “as something pre-established, a *fait accompli* (p.103).” Freire continues:

Both views are domesticated visions of the future. The first domesticates the present which should be repeated; the second reduces the future to something inexorable. Both negate people as beings of praxis, and in so doing they also reject history. They suffer from a lack of hope (p. 103).

As I stated earlier, the historical contexts that appeared to ground many of the participants’ themes exhibited an intergenerational character. Applying Freire’s lens on political literacy, these historical elements lack political dynamic. Perhaps the intergenerational historical qualities reflect knowledges that reside in a social sphere that is somehow insulated from the politics of economy. As I observed in the analysis in



Chapter Six, the participants seemed to have had a strong sense of economic cause and effect, and yet this sense was diluted or lost in the transition to the envisioned projects. Perhaps it was because their economic understanding was mainly embedded in the personal, individualistic, or social sphere, not in the political dynamics that could have linked them to broader critiques of power. Realizing this linkage could have brought the concrete realities and subjectivities of these autoworkers into an alignment with those they chose to work with.

### *Critical Reflection as Political Action*

The cornerstone of the Freirean approach outlined in Chapter Two of this study is centered on the simultaneous action/reflection of dynamic words. Freire points out in *Pedagogy of the oppressed* that without adequate reflection, action simply becomes activism, and without action words are only verbalism (2002, p.87). These elemental connections seem self-evident, but in the uneven and unpredictable process of dialogue, they are difficult to juggle.

As I pointed out in the analysis section of Chapter Six, I felt that the process of reflection in the group work was more like a restating of what had gone on before. It was a process of gathering ideas, but it was ultimately an uncritical assemblage. Part of this was due to the passive, uncritical and apolitical nature of the actions formed in this process. The actions were often simply topics to talk about next and timeframes; the material of agendas. In the group discussions and dialogue, there was an uncritical pattern to the way that ideas were named. The orientation of the participants was to construct in solidarity rather than to deconstruct. While there was a fair amount of sorting of ideas on the basis of what was relevant to the emerging focus of the projects, it seemed easier to simply tack on ideas as additional components in the positive spirit that prevailed.

Attempting to read between the action/reflection dialectic lines, reflection must be the positioning of these ideas for action, which is no simple matter. Freire comes close to corroborating this realization with his remark that “Reflection is only real when it sends us back to the given situation in which we act” (2004 p. xvi). Anticipating meaningful action as one initiates the act of reflection, seems dangerously close to predetermining the outcome of the reflection. I suspect that Freire would suggest that while in dialogue, effective problem posing would load the ideas to be gathered with potential for action. Ideas that are left un-interrogated, that have gone through no reterritorializing movement, simply have no energy for action at the moment of reflection.

Donna Haraway points out that in order to gain a clearer view of reality, we should seek out and privilege “contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing” (Giroux 1997, p.211). This is similar to what Giroux calls interrogating the “historically and socially constructed forms in which they live” (1997, p. 158). In the haste of construction, there was little room for the level of introspection that might have lead participants to “rewrite the complex narratives” of their own lives (Giroux 1997, p. 158). Without an intentional pedagogical component aimed directly at reterritorializing, it seems rather implausible to think that participants would take this stance independently. Again, it is possible that given more voices from the margins, a more critical dialogue may have organically developed, stimulating more deconstruction/reconstruction. Without those voices present and acting as sights of inquiry, and without pedagogical intervention, it is not surprising that these groups of participants could not get far beyond the boundaries of dominant discourse.

*Facilitation as a Political Act*

Viewing facilitation through the lens of politicization can help resolve some of the tensions that surface in dialogue. How much does a facilitator intervene in order to help politicization? Where is the boundary between pushing dialogue toward critical action/reflection, and imposing a political agenda? I have understood the role of facilitator to be fairly passive politically, with the main job being to help generate an equitable discovery of genuine voices. Yet this study reveals problems with this understanding. What has emerged in this study is that facilitation needs to be understood as a political action which requires a more rigorous and active role on the part of facilitator.

Donaldo Macedo insists that praxis is constructed of reflection and action that is inherently political in nature. Even if this study had been situated in the heart of the oppression it hopes to ameliorate, with authentic voices of the oppressed, praxis demands thinking in the realm of the political. Macedo puts the onus of this rigorous demand squarely on the shoulders of the facilitator:

The appropriation of the dialogic method as a process of sharing experiences is often reduced to a form of group therapy that focuses on the psychology of the individual. Although some educators may claim that this process creates a pedagogical comfort zone, in my view, it does little beyond making the oppressed feel good about his or her own sense of victimization. In other words, sharing experiences should not be understood in psychological terms only. It invariably requires a political and ideological analysis as well. That is, the sharing of experiences must always be understood within a social praxis that entails both reflection and political action. In short, it must always involve a political project with the objective of dismantling oppressive structures and mechanisms (Macedo, 2006: p. 175).

As most of the participants in the group work identified themselves in middle class locations (including the facilitator), it should not be surprising that the dialogue steered clear of the political. Being vested in the status quo, both in real and imagined

ways, makes the political realm a potentially dangerous place to tread. Politicization is a critical element whether participants locate themselves within the context of the proposed change or outside of it.

*Resolving the Tensions Between Organic Knowledge and Inserting Outside Knowledge in Dialogue*

This study was based on content generated out of the organic knowledges of the participants developed in dialogue. The wealth of knowledge exhibited was tremendous, despite the scarcity of political content and standpoints of the oppressed that have been mentioned. How can a balance be found between generating knowledge and insertion of outside/expert knowledges? What precautions should be taken in that process? When is it all right to use outside information and knowledge? Is it possible to insert expert knowledges without compromising the process of generating genuine voices?

Freire was very open to group demands for information. One idea he discussed in *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (2002, p.122) was to bring in taped interviews with specialists such as economists. In large urban centers such as the Twin Cities, it seems reasonable that “experts” in many fields could speak with the participants directly in dialogue with the group. For Freire, what is essential is the move from ingenious curiosity to epistemological curiosity. It is an internal metamorphosis based on critical thinking, particularly the capacity to become self critical:

It is my conviction that the difference and distance between ingenuity and critical thinking, between knowledge resulting from pure experience and that resulting from rigorous methodological procedure, do not constitute a rupture but a sort of further stage in the knowing process... In truth, ingenious ‘unarmed’ curiosity, which is associated with common sense knowledge, is the same curiosity that, as it develops its critical possibilities through a more rigorous methodological approximation of the known object, becomes epistemological curiosity. It changes in quality but not in essence. (1998, p.37)

Freire also believes that the action of critical thinking, even self-critical thinking can only occur through dialogue. “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking” (2002, p. 92). A guiding principle then would be that if information is presented to a group, it must be evaluated in the context of critical dialogue if it is going to lead to a clearer apprehension of the object of the dialogue. The locus of change, however, is within the individual.

Freire is well known for using the phrase “banking” as a way of describing education which simply “deposits” knowledge into the heads of students (2002, p. 72). Any pedagogical project that ignores the engagement of the participant in dialogue, with the potential for critical analysis, has no transformative possibility. Participants will remain in the realm of everyday learning (ingenious curiosity), learning through meaning schemes, new or old (Mezirow 1991) and in what Habermas calls strategic action rather than communicative action (1979).

Peter Mayo takes up some of the tensions around banking in his book *Gramsci, Freire and adult education: Possibilities for transformative action* (1999). As discussed in Chapter Two, Mayo outlines an argument by Antonio Gramsci that the insertion of information into dialogue is essential if it is going to go beyond the “vacuum” of “rhetoric” (p.48). Gramsci was suggesting using a mix of non-dialogic forms of pedagogy to transfer facts and increase rigor for the students. My suggestion for a resolution was that a Freirean approach would accommodate all different kinds of information as long as the demand for it came from the group and not the facilitator. Reflecting on the process and dialogic production of the group work in this study, I feel as though this resolution is incomplete. In light of the principle suggested above, I feel as though Freire would not

limit the flow of information in this way. The danger is uncritical acceptance of information, the sphere of propaganda. The shift then is to take information of all forms toward a critical reading and understanding in dialogue.

### *Political Pedagogic Intervention*

Above, I have demonstrated the strong need for politicization in applying a Freirean approach to developing community-based projects. What sort of interventions might work in this context? (See Figure 11) Gramsci felt it was essential that worker education include exposure to critiques of power and critiques of common sense. One possible format for such a critique could be a *Power Structure Analysis* (PSA), which has been mentioned several times in this dissertation. Anthony Thigpenn, a long time advocate for the poor in Los Angeles has developed a strategic tool for uncovering power relations within a geographical region that are relevant to particular community struggles. The information is translated in ways that inform the community politically, in ways that make action meaningful and effective. Using Thigpenn's model, the PSA developed in the Service Employees International Union and the United Auto Workers organizing campaign in Stamford Connecticut sought answers to questions about power in relation to their goals:

Who were the powerful forces and why? Which would be allies and which would be obstacles? How could we enhance the power of our friends and neutralize that of our opponents? The idea was to measure power in two ways, the first in absolute terms, but also in relation to goals. It is conceived to be as much a political education tool as anything. (McAlevy, 2003, p.4)

Developing political information that enhances problem posing in dialogue would clearly support what Abdul JanMohamed (McLaren, 2000, p.156-8) calls "clearer antagonisms". Bridging a clearer understanding of systems of domination with the participant's concrete situation of oppression amplifies the political dynamic in critical

dialogue. PSA's, produced by researchers, inserted into dialogue as propositions for discussion exemplifies the type of political pedagogical intervention I have suggested. For the purposes of supporting a Freirean approach, I would also attempt to frame the information in the language and structure of dialectics where possible, to integrate this element of the political as well.

There are two other interventions that lend themselves to group dialogue. As mentioned earlier, arranging to have guest speakers who have critical/political perspectives to share could be an excellent way of bringing politically charged elements into dialogue. I am particularly interested in this human approach for two reasons. The first is because it allows the group participants to request information relevant to their particular meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. The second is that it could help to broaden the representation of voice from standpoints which at least partially locate within a context under consideration by the group. Another intervention that would be worth pursuing, sometimes referred to as "best practices" are projects and or models that appear to be working. This would require study on the part of the facilitator in order to insure that they are adequately politicized.

These concluding remarks outline a vision for dialogue that is intentionally political. What follows, are three figures that provide a visual representation of how inserting politicization could work. One typical way to interpret Freire's dialogic process is to rely on facilitated problem posing within the context of dialogue as the sole politicizing element (see Figure 10). However, most people do not have Freire's nimble facilitation skills, nor the experience to spontaneously problematize participant perceptions, much less their own understandings mediated by dominant discourses. Problem posing is perhaps the most challenging aspect of politicization. Becoming more

intentional and skilled as a facilitator is one step. Another that seems hopeful would be to engage teams of facilitators, working in tandem to develop stronger group praxis.

In order to augment problem posing, I am proposing the purposeful insertion of four politicizing elements into the process of dialogue (see Figure 11). The four are a) Community dialogue, b) Power structure analysis, c) Research and guest speakers, and d) Linkages to community based organizations, public institutions, and private ventures.

The four elements I am proposing must be carefully situated in a symbiotic relationship within the dialogic process, both informing and being informed by the participants engaged in dialogue. The element of community dialogue should center on discussions with people who live within the specific communities under consideration in dialogue, broadening the range of voices heard and the potential for surfacing counter-hegemonic discourses.

The insertion of the PSA combined with linkages to community based organizations, public institutions (including government agencies, the legislature, etc.) and private ventures opens up the potential to critique social and economic responses to existing power arrangements and to examine “best practices” that might support or resist the status quo.

With these politicizing elements in place, group dialogue can be enhanced, exposing the participants more extensively in issues of race, class, and gender. These elements can also provide information demystifying the historical context of the present situation, while offering pedagogical openings to develop dialectic thinking, and the critical/political reflection needed to stimulate praxis (see figure 12).



Figure 10  
View of a Freirean form of dialogue

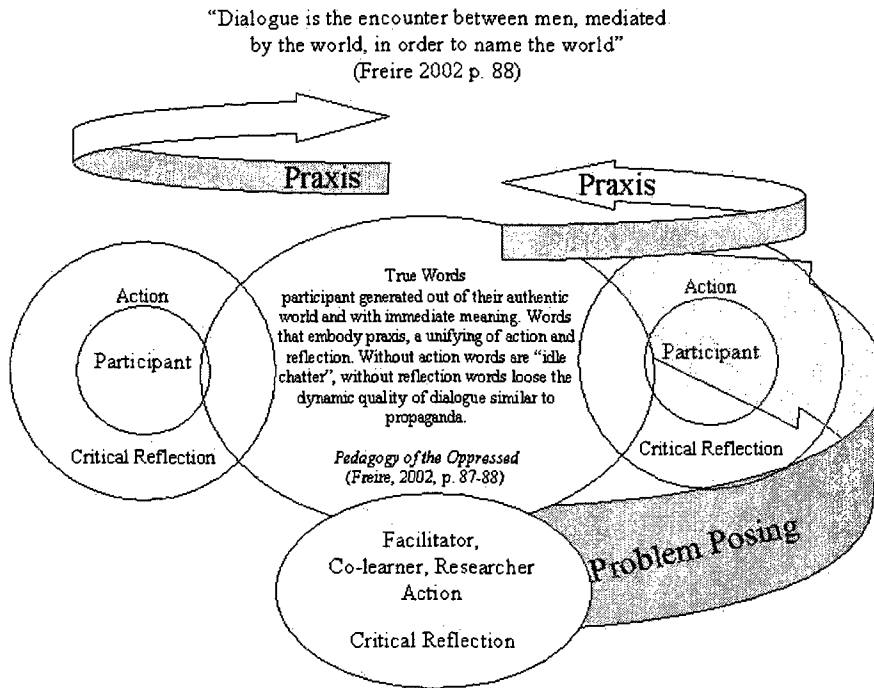


Figure 11  
Four elements of politicization

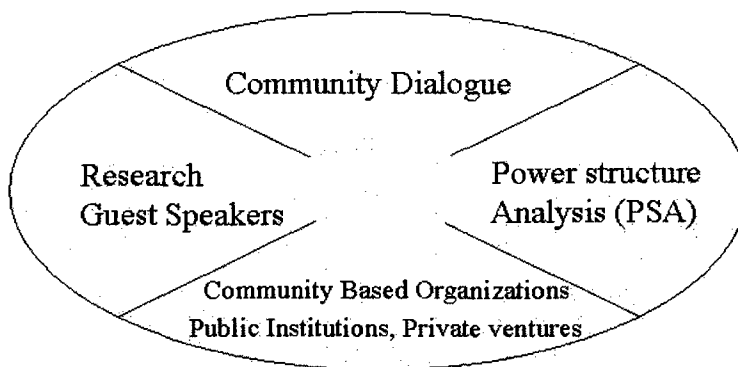
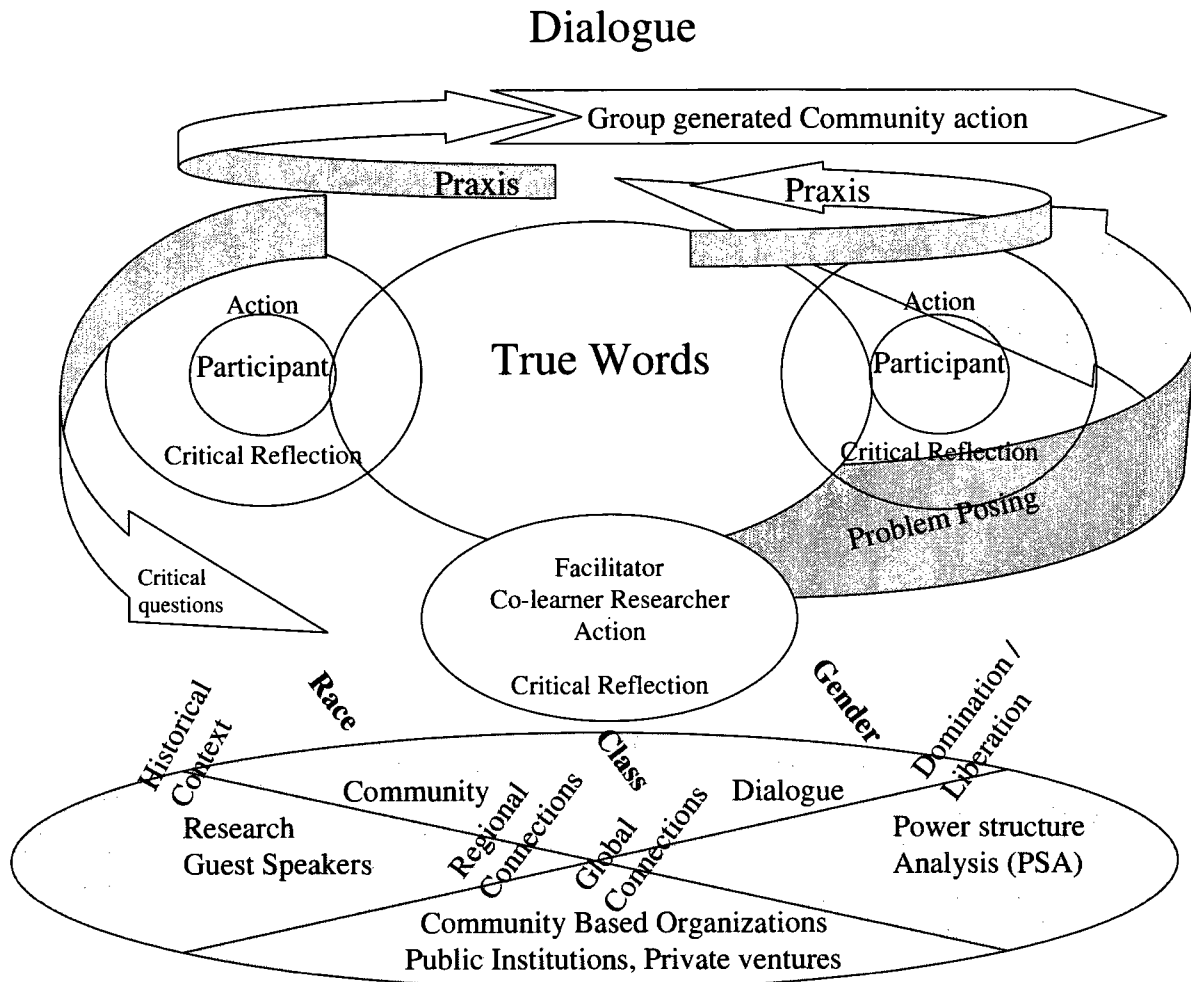


Figure 12.  
A more politicized Freirean approach



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## Appendix A

### *Materials Contained in the Recruitment Packet*

#### *Brief description of the project.*

The following description is taken from the project abstract that is used to give a boiled down version of the work to take place.

This study is an exploration into developing social change projects based on popular education principles adapted from the work of Paulo Freire and informed by other voices within the field of Critical Pedagogy and related traditions. Working with 15 volunteer autoworkers that are interested in social change, this project emerges out of the commonly held issues, contradictions, and themes they generate. These themes become the project content, which are problematized, through a process of dialogue and guided by an action-reflection form of praxis with the expressed purpose of developing a vision of the early stages of a social movement project. By taking advantage of these powerful aspects of popular education, this project attempts to link a community-centered approach to a geographically splintered group, but who share working and wage conditions as union labor in a Midwestern assembly plant.

The main questions include:

- What issues will emerge as unifying themes, given the broad community orientation of generative theme development?
- What form of project will be envisioned?
- How does a Freirean approach to dialogics enable project development?

There are several elements in this abstract that are important. I want to further describe three of these elements that are important to understand before committing to this project.

There will be two interviews that will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes each. The first interview will cover questions about you, your impressions about work, family, community, and worldview. We will discuss issues that are important to you, and also your views of how things could or should be, if change were possible. You will have a chance to ask any questions that come to mind, and you will be encouraged to elaborate on ideas that you may have already talked about, but have more to add.

The second interview will be conducted after other participants have completed first interviews. The focus of the second interview will be on one particular issue that you share with others, that may become the topic of concern by those participating in the group work to follow. There are two main tasks for this interview. The first is to develop a sense of what you see as contradictions that surround the issue at hand. These contradictions could surface between what is actually happening, and what could be, what is actually happening and what is supposedly happening, between how people feel about an issue and what they actually do about it, etc. . . . In order to prepare for the group work, and to help speed things along, I am asking the participants to create or co-create with me, at least one symbol of an important contradiction. These symbolic representations, called *codes*, could be visual: a cartoon, a painting, a picture of an advertisement, a photograph of a place or actual objects brought to the first meeting. A code could also be written in the form of a statement, or a poem. It could also incorporate multimedia such as a brief segment of a film, or something recorded from television. A code could also involve performance of some kind, a short skit, a reading, or a pantomime.

The purpose of these codes is to spur on dialogue in the early stages of the group work, to let people know something of what each participant thinks about the issue under

discussion. It is not essential that everyone produces a code for the group work, but it is an element of dialogue under study in this project.

The group work will begin by looking at a model of dialogue developed by the Brazilian born educator Paulo Freire. Freire felt strongly that careful listening, speaking and thinking among people was essential in order to gain a clearer understanding of reality. In order to change reality, people needed to engage in a continuous process of action (taking small steps such as gathering information, contacting people, flyer dropping for meetings, etc..) and reflecting on the action to inform new action.

Freire felt that there were pre-conditions that needed to be met by participants in dialogue, and I would like you to look at them carefully, and think about them before you agree to participate in a group.

- Dialogue involves a horizontal relationship that is founded on a profound *love for the world*. Every participant (including the researcher) is valued and respected for their participation.
- Freire uses the word *humility* to describe an understanding that knowledge is fluid and ever re-creating. What this means to participants is that we must be open to surprise, new learning, and perhaps an abandonment of some of what we have held as “truth”.
- *Faith* in this case describes a belief in other human beings and their desire to engage in the critical work of transformation once they are able to see the possibility for positive change. For members of a group, this means letting go of the idea of impossibility and focusing on possibility.

- *Hope* is an understanding that we are engaged in unfinished projects. This means that we position this group work between struggles that have come before this group came together, and those that will come after.

It is a lot to think about, and yet I would agree with Freire, that if these preconditions are met, a respectful and productive process would develop. Rather than adopt elaborate rules of engagement, we will develop processes centered on these preconditions.

All of the steps of this project, from the interviews, the development of codes, the way dialogue and action – reflection move the thinking of the participants, and also the vision for a project which may or may not develop will be important aspects of the analysis, conclusions and recommendations of the subsequent dissertation.

# CONSENT FORM

## UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

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**Title: Worker Generated Issues, Critical Dialogue and Praxis.**  
**IRB #**

### Background Information:

I am conducting a study for a dissertation as part of an education program I am completing. The main focus of this study is to look at how a small group of autoworkers might plan to make some kind of change in a social issue that they feel strongly about. I am looking into three major questions and working with either active or separated autoworkers from this assembly plant.

Roughly, the three questions are:

1. What issues do the participants have in common that might bring them together?
2. Given time together in a group (three sessions), what sort of project would the group plan?
3. How does the way in which the group works, change over the three sessions?

The research begins with a series of two one-on-one interviews with the researcher, lasting no longer than 1 ½ hours per session. The first interview is structured around the pre-interview questionnaire questions (included in this packet) that have been designed to gain information on different aspects of your life and experiences, as well as ways you describe yourself. Depending on the answers provided by you on the questionnaire, the interview questions will serve to clarify, give examples, tell some of the stories that surround your impressions and knowledge. The first interview will ultimately lead to a conversation about local, regional and global issues that you feel strongly about. In the second interview we will focus on your understandings and feelings about one of these issues. It will begin with the statements made during the first interview about the issue in question, confirming what you said and meant, using them as a springboard to engage more deeply, and perhaps more broadly, or more specifically with the issue. You may be asked to develop a sensory representation of some aspect of this issue. This representation could be a quote, a video clip, newspaper advertisement, a picture hanging on your wall, a photograph etc... . The purpose is to sum up some aspect of the way you feel about an issue or to expose some of the contradictions that seem important to discuss. The plan is to use participant generated representations as a starting point for subsequent group work. The group work will be focused on one particular issue that is of interest to all those participating, and will be conducted in a series of 3 sessions which will last between 1 ½ - 3 hours per session. As well as audio recording these sessions, I intend to document any drawings, artwork, literature, and agendas, generated by the group with the use of a digital camera. The total time commitment would not exceed 12 hours of interaction time, plus additional time to fill out a pre-interview questionnaire and to read and understand this consent form. The interviews will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient for you. Locations could include the UAW-Ford-MnSCU Training Center conference room, or classrooms, libraries, or other public places near work or near your home. The group work will take place at location that all members agree to, with an emphasis on a place easily accessible to all the participants. I invite you to participate in this research. If at any time you have questions or need clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me. My telephone number and email can be found in the Contacts and Questions section of this form (pg2).

### **Procedures:**



If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. To read, understand, and sign this consent agreement
2. To fill out a pre-interview questionnaire
3. To participate in a series of two interviews each one not to exceed 1.5 hours in length.
4. To participate in 3 group session, not to exceed 3 hours per session.
5. To help with interpreting your information through follow up questions

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has some risk. Perhaps the main one has to do with your identity among those who know you well. Using an alias system of identification, your identity will be known by only the researcher in all published materials and communications outside of the group work environment. Since it is likely that some of your views and stories will be published in a dissertation paper and could be accessed by others through library loan, there is a possibility that someone could recognize you through the knowledges you have shared. Since it is impossible to effectively shield your identity from the other four to six members of the group you may end up working with, I will ask that personal information that individuals share, not be shared with others outside of the group.

It is possible that probing into personal matters in the interviews may cause discomfort. Every attempt will be made to steer clear of matters you wish not to share. Questions will be rephrased to move the interview to more comfortable ground, or abandoned if the discomfort is not relieved. Should the discomfort not be relieved to your satisfaction, you have the unconditional right to withdraw from the study. You also are encouraged to contact the University of Saint Thomas Institutional Review Board should the discomfort remain unresolved.

If you participate in the group work portion of this project it is possible that you may witness or be directly involved in heated discussions that may surface in an effort to deal with serious issues. While everyone is encouraged to be respectful and to value all participants, it will ultimately be my (the researcher's) responsibility to bring conflict under control.

There will be no direct benefits from this project for you.

### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I publish, I will make every attempt, not to include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. Research records will be kept in a locked file; I am the only person who will have control over these records, though I may have colleagues view selected anonymous sections of your interviews. Portions of the interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed into print form. Once the transcripts have been checked for accuracy, the recordings will be destroyed. The group process will also be recorded, and all copies of these recordings will be destroyed when the dissertation is accepted. All of this should be accomplished by July of 2008.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas or me. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw prior to the group portion of the study, data collected about you from the pre-interview questionnaire, and interviews will not be used in the study. As it will be impossible to unweave your presence within a group, portions of your information, and contributions will remain in the data, and analysis of this project. Your right to withdraw at any time, however, remains open throughout the entire project.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Tim O'Brien. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 651-239-1168, [tjobrien1@stthomas.edu](mailto:tjobrien1@stthomas.edu). You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study, and authorize the use of digital recording devices throughout the process for documentation purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## Appendix B

### *Pre Interview Questionnaire*

How do you describe yourself when asked the following questions? Please be brief, if you wish to say more, we can extend your answers in the interview process. All of these questions are open to your personal interpretation, and the answers are in your own words. Some of the questions may need more explanation than I have given. Feel free to skip any questions that are puzzling, and we can address them in the first interview. If you find any questions offensive in any way or too personal in nature, please skip them and bring them to my attention.

1. What is your ethnic background, or family heritage?
2. What is your race?
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your economic class?
5. How do you describe your family?
6. What community do you live in?
7. Do you feel connected to your neighbors and/or the community in which you live? In what ways?
8. Have you been an active participant in your neighborhood or community? In what ways?
9. How do you describe your relationship to religion or spirituality?
10. Have you been an active member of a church? In what ways?

11. How do you describe your participation within the politics of your community, your home state, and the U.S.?
12. In a few sentences, describe what you think democracy is or should be.
13. What is the highest level of education that you have attained?
14. Were there any parts of your educational experience that stand out as being very positive?
15. Were there any parts of your educational experience, which stand out as being very negative?
16. Quickly make a list of jobs you have had in the past 10 years, and very briefly describe your position(s). (If you have a resume, feel free to submit it instead of making this list)
17. Are there aspects of your work experience that you consider to be positive?
18. Are there aspects of your work experience that you consider to be negative?
19. Are you active socially with some of the people at work? What are some examples?
20. Have you been an active participant in any unions? In what ways?
21. What are the major issues facing your local community? (Try to name 3-6)
22. What are the major issues facing the country? (Try to name 3-6)
23. What are the major issues facing the World? (try to name 3-6)
24. Do you have any issues with working in a small group?

In the analysis, and publication of the dissertation, I would like to protect your identities as much as possible. One helpful approach is to identify you with an alternative name. What alternative (first) name would you prefer I use to identify you?

Please jot down any questions that come to mind about this project. We can discuss them at our first interview.

## Appendix C

### *Interpretive Description of Group Work*

#### *Raising Children: a community approach*

##### *Session 1*

The first group session for *Raising Children: a community approach* began slowly as people arrived over the first fifteen minutes. We began with five of the six members; Uchembua was absent for the first meeting. As people joined the group getting some food and something to drink, greetings were made. Some participants knew each other well, some had past associations that quickly rekindled, while a few people had never met.

I began the meeting by reviewing the purpose of the group work which was to envision a project that addressed the issue of the generative theme of raising children from a community approach. I reminded them that the idea for a project should be one that they, as a group, felt was possible, but that the scope wasn't necessarily restricted to what they themselves could do. If it was of a larger scale, then they might think about how to go about initiating it.

As facilitator, I purposefully moved the dialogue in the direction of the codes, by asking each participant to describe their idea for a code if they had one. The ensuing conversation was made up of both the concepts for the codes and a broader context that included stories about growing up, and perceptions of what is happening today. Many of the stories were reconstructions of those which surfaced in the interviews, but not all.

Camilla spoke about her small town experience as a child in the state of Durango in Mexico. There were only four or five houses in town and to this day there is still no electricity. With some of the houses occupied by her relatives, the town was like one big

family. Because there was little money, and none for toys, she remembers often being absorbed in the process of creating things to play with out of scraps and trash. Her memory is of kids simply being with other kids, never bored, always something to do. Her mother was in charge of the household, and Camilla can't remember anyone ever questioning what they were asked or told to do. In contrast, she sees her kids growing up constantly bombarded by dangers like drugs and sex. There seems to be a culture of disrespect in the community that has permeated, to some degree, her relations with her children.

Lenny spoke about growing up in a small town on the Iron Range in north-central Minnesota in the early 1960's. As a young teenager, he remembers being on all day outings with his friends, miles from home. He remarked that in contrast he wouldn't feel safe letting a child do that today.

I asked the group "Do you feel there is more fear and disrespect today than when you were growing up?" Brent suggested that in terms of exposure to violence and sex, there is more going on in a thirty-second commercial today than could be found in a two-hour movie from the 1970's. The media has shifted a great deal. He remembers being ten years old and being on his own after school every day. He feels that kids today are not allowed to be kids. They are constantly being pulled out of that role.

When Teresa was young there was a retired neighbor who looked after many of the kids on the block. The parents would support her with groceries and help when she needed it. Teresa also remembers that even though there was some drug dealing and prostitution in the area, the kids rarely saw any of it. The children in her circle were always required to be home when the streetlights came on, leaving the night for other pursuits.

Lenny made the comment that we as a society seem to have lost our trust of one another. He suggested that people are very reluctant to let a neighbor watch their kids like they did when Teresa was growing up. Teresa responded by saying that we as a society have “cut each other loose.” Families and neighborhoods have lost their intergenerational connections. She feels that not knowing each other leads to not trusting each other. It seems like everybody is afraid of something.

After a ten minute break, I reintroduced and made available copies of a brief description of the project, which was a part of the pre-interview packet given to everyone who was interested in joining the study (see Appendix A). I went forward with an explanation of Paulo Freire’s ideas about praxis and dialogue. Part of this discussion introduced Freire’s work in literacy projects and also the crucial role that dialogue plays in any kind of transformative change. Interpreting Freire’s 5 preconditions for dialogue, the following four phrases were written on the board: value and respect, knowledge is fluid, positive possibilities, and unfinished projects.

The group appeared to readily accept the concept of each participant valuing and respecting each other. Introducing the idea that knowledge is fluid, I took a moment to describe a process of theory development that each of us use in everyday life. I outlined the idea that Steven Brookfield suggests, that theory is often “eminently practical” and that it is a basic human activity (2005 p.3). I explained how we experience this, when we hold on to a particular process, drawn from experience and tradition, until it fails to explain an outcome after which we begin to develop new explanations and processes that build new knowledges to address these new circumstances.

I explained the concept of positive possibilities as it relates to the idea that Freire calls “faith”. The thrust of this precondition is that if people are able to envision the



possibility of a positive outcome, they will naturally work toward that end. The participants seemed to take this premise at face value, and no one had any questions about the meaning.

I explained that the concept of “unfinished projects” is simply that the work will continue to change, or it will end. New projects will come along to address issues in new ways. People will engage, disengage, and perhaps reengage with work, and this is only natural. There were no comments generated out of the description of this element of dialogue.

The 5th precondition was not written on the board, but opened a discussion about praxis. Freire points out that while critical thinking is not essential for dialogue, it is crucial if people want to enter into an action / reflection form of praxis. Describing action / reflection in the context of this project, I suggested that we could start engaging in such a process by first taking a moment to consider what had been discussed and then building a plan for what to do next. Everyone agreed that this would be a good idea.

Constructing a list on the white board from group memory, I wrote the following phrases: family and community, trust, kids growing up, effects of sex in media commercials and influence, lost touch with elders and extended generations, and principles and morals. Reviewing these ideas provoked some new thoughts, and the group decided to continue the discussion for another 30 minutes after which they would regroup to plan some action steps.

After some dialogue about how we are disconnected from older generations, Lenny brought up the analogy of building construction, comparing the connection across generations to the structure of a house. He suggested that there was no foundation anymore. Without it, the structure cannot be sound and strong. Several people brought up

their relations with their parents, and aunts and uncles. Marissa learned from her aunts and uncles that you accept family no matter what.

Brent talked about the stress of taking care of his dad and developing burn out seeing their relationship deteriorate. Camilla was empathetic. Though her mother is living nearby with one of her sisters, Camilla feels the strain of her mother's need to have things her own way. There is often tension in her mother's relationship with Camilla and her siblings.

Collecting these ideas, I posed two questions to the group. First I asked how we, as members of a community, might deal with this disconnection we have with the older generation? Related to this, I asked how changing demographics in households, might be playing a role in this disconnection? People spoke about how there seem to be fewer kids in most households now.

Following a question about changing the media culture, Lenny brought up that the idea of changing culture is very difficult, perhaps impossible, but we have to try.

“Because the way the world is getting to be now, I'm not saying everybody, but a lot of people have just totally given up. They say what's the use...” Camilla agreed and added “ Well its not going to do any good if you don't try.”

Marissa suggested creating a Pepsi like commercial highlighting successful families with both parents. She felt this would help teach children the meaning of families and bring them closer together.

Camilla suggested putting a group together with people from different countries. Her thought was to construct the group in schools or neighborhoods where large groups of foreign-born people lived and then working on issues that would help different groups understand one another. She described a kind of training program perhaps started by

members of the *Raising Children* group. She was envisioning this training cascading back into the community in some way.

Brent suggested asking the elders why they think the connection has been lost. I thought this an important perspective, but it was overlooked at the time as the conversation shifted back toward tensions the participants were having with their own children.

With the three-hour time limit quickly approaching, we decided to reflect at the beginning of the next meeting and set up action steps at that time. We set the next meeting date for two weeks at the same time and concluded the first meeting.

### *Session 2*

As with the first meeting, the participants arrived one at a time over a period of about 20 minutes. Teresa was absent from this second session. Uchembua joined the group for the first time, and after introductions I asked him to describe the idea he had for his code and perhaps a bit about growing up in Nigeria. Downplaying his code, which was about the business community stepping up to help neighborhoods and families, he began by talking about what a great childhood he had had. He had aunts, uncles and grandparents all living near each other, and he grew up with a large number of brothers and sisters, as well as nieces and nephews. He felt blessed as a child. As he came into adulthood, he and four of his siblings and a cousin came to the United States for education and jobs. They all went to different parts of the country. As they had families, their nieces and nephews didn't get to know each other. He senses that everyone felt pretty lonely while in this country, and they all went back eventually, except him. Uchembua said, "Those things we had when we were children which we loved so much, we haven't transferred to our children." As a result it is a struggle for them.

After Uchembua finished I opened the next stage of the group work with a brief discussion about looking beyond what Paulo Freire called “limit situations” to the horizon of what is possible. I also introduced a small piece of what Michelle Foucault called utopia / heterotopia (McLaren, 2000, p.156-8). I suggested that if we could agree on a piece of that horizon then working back to where we are today will inform us of the work we need to accomplish. I recommended that one way to help see the horizon more clearly was to step out from where you are and suspend disbelief. In this way, limit situations can become challenges rather than roadblocks. I proposed that if we found a worthwhile project, it would probably always be changing and tackling new challenges.

After taking a short break, the group came back together and we reflected on some of the major themes that had come up so far in dialogue. Working from my notes, and with members of the group adding to and modifying them, we came up with the following list: we have lost trust in each other, the link between elders and children seems to have been broken, kids are required to grow up too fast, the media is a part of the problem, we need a good foundation to start to change this, and there are several possible ways to connect people- through family, neighborhoods and community centers. The group agreed to take an action step looking at the horizon for about 40 minutes. I used the phrase that Miles Horton of Highlander Folk School fame suggested, of looking to the “ought to be” (Horton, 1989, p. 232). After a few moments of confusion, I refocused the dialogue on the idea of “raising kids” and what ought to be.

Uchembua wanted to bring up the idea of responsibility. He felt that too much of the responsibility for raising children has been pushed on to people other than the parents. Teachers have a particularly rough time dealing with kids who have not been prepared for going to school.

I asked, “Do you feel that parents are taking less responsibility today than they used to?” The response from everyone was in the affirmative. Camilla said “Yeah, because they have to go and work all the time. Especially the mom” She feels that this is the main reason why things are getting so out of control. People have to run around all the time. Lenny said that it was like everyone had to be on a tight schedule.

Brent asked, “Do we have to run? Do both parents have to work?” He went on to describe a litany of consumer goods people wanted and thought they needed. He raised the question, “Does everyone need a car?” Camilla suggested that people want so much stuff that one parent can’t possibly make enough to get it all. Uchembua recollected several times in the not too distant past where marketing campaigns had been so effective that people were actually fighting over buying things. They were building up their debt and then having to work just to keep going.

I introduced the idea of dialectic connections, trying to initiate thinking about themes and their opposites. I suggested that poverty and wealth were often used as an example of this kind of linkage. Though we often see them as disconnected, they are the antithesis of one another, and so linked. Using a theme we had been discussing, I asked “What would be the antithesis of the idea that moms are too busy?”

Marissa suggested that the antithesis would be: mom’s not working so much. Uchembua said that you couldn’t have this dialectic without dealing with consumerism. “They are all connected. Because that’s what drives the damn thing. You want to go to work to make money so you can buy.” This led Brent to ask how do we change “... this society of mass consumption.”

Marissa brought up her trip to Venezuela where she experienced a sense of community that exemplified her vision of the adage that “it takes a village to raise a

child.” Camilla suggested that this would be difficult to replicate here. She refocused the dialogue back to consumerism, and parent-child relations. She said that mom’s want their children to have the best things. She added that there was a lot of competition to get stuff for kids.

The dialogue moved to the pressure that kids are facing today. Several people brought up the negative demands that children face in organized sports. Identifying other pressures on children, Lenny suggested that kids didn’t seem able to have fun. There was general agreement to this, that kids should be able to be kids in the same way that these participants were able to be when they were young. Camilla suggested that one way to change this competitive relationship was to have parents come out and watch the kids play. If parents were around, they would get better at just supporting the kids having fun.

Brent suggested that parents should look back at what they did as kids to inform them about what they should expect from kids. It was suggested that our culture sends a lot of messages about what “good parenting” looks like, particularly having the latest consumer products. “We should be the cheerleaders” though letting go of all the expectations is very difficult when you are a parent.

After taking a short break we had a discussion around action steps. I encouraged the group to begin to narrow down the horizon and to keep in the back of their heads the idea of a project. I asked the group members to reflect for a moment on how the dialogue had been going. Lenny appreciated the diversity of the group. He feels it is important to simply share ideas and that the process of sharing ideas is powerful. Brent suggested having groups like this for the kids. He felt it would need to be moderated by a fairly specialized person, in the vein of a chemical dependency counselor. The facilitator would help kids get their issues out in order to get help from their peers to solve them.

Uchembua thought there could be a group like this for parents, envisioning it being organized through the school system. He could see it developing around school conferences, and giving parents a chance to raise parenting issues that they were having trouble with.

Brent admitted that he has been anxious going into schools, and feels that there are many people who feel alienated. Rather than soliciting for money, one suggestion might be to have parents volunteer in the schools for an hour or two a month. This was a good lead into a tutoring project that Lenny was involved in at a local elementary school. The plant originally supported it for the first year, but even though the support was withdrawn, Lenny continued to volunteer for another two years. Through the process he said that it made him feel better about himself. He feels that it is important to give back to the community.

The dialogue shifted to a discussion of the various different intergenerational groups that might make up a volunteer project. Uchembua talked about parents like himself, whose kids are grown, as being a great untapped source of volunteers. As another source, Brent added students of professions in social work or teaching. Lenny suggested that because working people are generally under so much pressure, retirees were a good source as well. There was consensus that it is important for people to see the need to give back to the community.

Uchembua expanded on the theme of retiree volunteers, adding that the connection between young and old ensures that the young understand some things about what has happened in the past.

We regrouped to reflect on the dialogue around narrowing the horizon. Listing on the white board as participants chimed in, the following themes were generated: using

parent teacher conferences as a springboard for parent groups, potential volunteer groups (including pre-family young adults, older adults with grown children, retirees/grandparents), volunteer presence in the neighborhood (to rekindle the connections that stay at home parents used to have), and a facilitated conference of sorts for kids. I asked the group if they felt any of these ideas were strong enough to continue to pursue.

Lenny brought up his practice of welcoming every new neighbor who moves on the block. Brent, Marissa, and Camilla all spoke up about how important this kind of activity was to building community. There was a conversation around different people's experiences with block clubs. Brent observed that people get very complacent, but less so when there are problems in the neighborhood.

Marissa wondered if kids shouldn't be the volunteers. She described a service-learning project that one of her kids is involved in with their church. It is similar to day camp, and costs money. Brent remembers doing volunteer work at his local community center when he was young. They used to bag and transport groceries donated for food shelves. Since the kids were spending time at the recreation center, it was just expected that every now and then they would help with some of the work.

Brent also remembers a youth-jobs program for teenaged kids. He wasn't sure whether it was a federal or state program however there was a lot of work, paying minimum wages. I believe he was referring to Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), a U.S. National Park Service summer youth program (for ages 15-18) which is administered by different agencies, depending on the state. Brent was paid to be a counselor-in-training at a camp, while others worked at lawn care and gardening for the local parks. The idea of AmeriCorps came up, a program where high school graduates volunteer for projects in



different parts of the country, their expenses are paid and, if they complete the term, they get a set amount of college scholarship money. Lenny said there was a local program in his small town, through the vocational college, where he could get jobs with the county or city to pay for college.

This discussion moved the dialogue into a brainstorming process focused on a potential project. Camilla wondered if the schools could play a central role in administering or organizing a program. Brent felt that it could probably be done through the neighborhood centers or Parks and Recreation department. There was a suggestion that the kids and parents who do participate in recreation programming and neighborhood centers were probably less in need than those who are just out in the neighborhood.

Camilla suggested that there should be a recreational component to this, where the kids could play part of the time. There was some discussion about using sports as a reward for the work, as well as giving the kids' time to just play.

The concept of a paid summer work program began to come into focus, specifically designed to employ kids who didn't have anything else to do. Brent suggested that the employment should be "valued work," important to both the kids and the community, so that the kids could look back after two or three weeks and see what they had accomplished.

There was some discussion about whether this should be a day a week, or run every week all summer long. Uchembua thought that something like this might work in his neighborhood. He felt it would be important to give people who had nothing to do some kind of employment.

With 25 minutes left, Camilla suggested that the time went very fast. She thought the group was working better than it did the first session. Lenny said that he had really

enjoyed the dialogue. Marissa thought that trust was being built. We dialogued for a while about the possibilities of Popular Education. Brent felt that this process of praxis could work really well in a neighborhood.

I asked the group if a paid summer program for kids was something that they could all get behind. They agreed. I suggested that I could review the recording of the discussion and type up notes to share with Tanya. I planned to send them out by e-mail to each of them for their review, and after feedback I would pass them on.

The group decided to take an action step in the time before the next meeting. The idea was to ask neighbors, friends and family, particularly kids, what kinds of activities they would like to see accomplished by an organized group of kids from their neighborhood. I offered to create a simple form and add that to the e-mailed notes. We set up the next meeting for the same time and day two weeks in the future.

### Session 3

Camilla, Marissa, Brent, and Lenny made up the group for this third session, Uchembua and Teresa were absent. After people arrived, the meeting began with a brainstorming session listing and explaining past themes to use as a basis for reflection. This train of thought quickly transformed into a discussion attempting to further define the project. The group agreed that this should be the first action step of the session, and we would try to reflect after about 40 minutes. Referring to the notes sent out after the second session, I put on the whiteboard the following project description: A summer long paid project for youth that mixed both work and recreation.

Lenny posed several questions, starting with, "How do we get these people involved in this project?" He was interested in the problem of motivating participation with people who are already too busy to get involved in other things. He also wondered

how the process of communication would work so that potential participants might not only hear what the project is about, but also give their feedback on different aspects of the project that they would like to see modified, changed or embraced.

Several project elements emerged in the dialogue, further refining ideas that had come up already. This project should focus on youth who have limited or no recreational or employment opportunities during the summer months. The content of the projects should be developed at the neighborhood level, seeking input from both adults and youth in the community. A component of the project should be to reach out and communicate with all the households on a block through organized block clubs, or connecting with people willing to support the project by talking with their neighbors.

Brent suggested that student clubs from local schools be a part of the support, development and recruitment network for the project. Camilla suggested that the police department should be involved. There was some resistance to this idea at first, but as she explained “I think Police know a lot that is going on in the city, and they will give you feedback.” Brent, who was initially skeptical, suggested that the city of Minneapolis had cut down youth crime by targeting truancy. The truancy program could be an important connection to the population this project hopes to serve.

Reflecting on these elements, the group produced a list of components that were put on the whiteboard: the target population should be kids who don't have anything to do in the summer; the project should include the community in some essential way and should be locally developed; youth recruitment could be tied into schools (tapping into existing student clubs and organizations and possibly using truancy programs); block clubs and neighborhood organizations could also be used for project recruitment and development.

Brainstorming some types of activities for the project, the group focused on activities that created some kind of balance between public works and art and recreation. The discussion exposed a tension between work that would be valued by the community, and activities that would motivate the participants. Camilla first suggested graffiti and tagging removal. Brent added the idea of combining mural art with the activity. This mirrored a small project he had heard about which linked public art projects with graffiti removal by youth offenders involved in tagging. Other activities included gardening and helping with outdoor summer events that are held in their community. The idea was originally to provide the service of cleaning up afterward, but through dialogue, this concept evolved into a more meaningful participation. Perhaps the young workers could be involved in the planning and implementation stages of a community event.

Lenny brought up the point that youth would probably need a great deal of direction from the start. Leadership and structure would be important as well as training and education. If the project was able to target youth with nothing to do in the summer, these components may be even more essential. Another idea that Lenny surfaced was to try to provide many different types of opportunities so that they "... wouldn't get bored." A part of this concept would be to have a way to include youth input into what kind of projects they would eventually participate in.

The focus of the dialogue shifted to the adults involved in the project. As discussed early on in Session 2, the three pools of possible adults that were identified were young college students entering youth service careers, retirees who could interact part time, and working adults with grown children. The roles that college students and retirees might have, were further refined.

Brent had suggested that college students working toward degrees in social work and teaching might be a good group of people to work with the project's target population. There was some discussion about what point in the college programs to recruit for this. No conclusions were drawn, but the question remained as an important piece of the project development puzzle. It was suggested that there needed to be some kind of compensation, whether it be in the form of a paid internship or a stipend for school. One idea that surfaced was to pay a stipend for their last year of college if they completed two years of this service.

Lenny advocated again for retirees to be a part of the project. He suggested that the personal experiences of these older people and the possibility of free time made them really worth considering as a volunteer group:

... They could give them (youth) a sense of direction. It would be good for the kids. It would be good for the retirees. It would be good for the community. All in all it would make a nice ball ... like a puzzle. The pieces are going to come together sooner or later, and you're going to make a stronger foundation for this thing.

The list of elements generated earlier in the session was typed up during a short break. Brent looked up the web site for a community building non-profit called the Search Institute located in Northeast Minneapolis. This group consolidates and publishes the latest research on community building strategies for local community organizations and offers to bring in leaders in the field to hold seminars and to advise. It would be important to work with such a group to help get the word out about a potential project, and to get advice on implementation.

The dialogue focused briefly on a recreational component to the project. The notion of recreation and play that seemed important in Session two was eclipsed in this discussion by the perceived need for educational enrichment. Centering on the actual

project activities and the training around the job skills and community activism components, the main thought was to incorporate field trips to places like the arboretum, science museum, and local businesses and non-profits. There could also be time built in for mentoring. The informal sports ideas that had come up in the first two sessions were, at this point, relegated to the lunch hour.

The group spent the next few minutes crafting a mission statement that was short and dense along the same lines as one found on the web site of the Search Institute. With Marissa writing, the group worked together to wordsmith this mission statement: To provide young adults with knowledge, self-responsibility and team cohesion, encouraging community involvement.

There was a consensus to meet for at least one more session to put these ideas into a format that could be used in a grant proposal. I agreed to find some templates to choose from and to send out the list of project elements that had been listed on the white board throughout the session. Other action steps were suggested including trying to recover the questionnaires that some people had distributed to neighbors and friends, and to talk to young people about the idea of this project to get some feedback.

#### *Session 4*

The session began with an overview of several grant templates. From the World Wide Web, I had pulled grant applications from two local philanthropic businesses, and two generic templates from websites supporting nonprofits seeking grant funding. I recommended one that was posted on the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's website specifically for pursuing corporate grants. The group decided to use this form (see Figure13). They chose to leave the fiscal part out of the discussion and focus on the narrative descriptions of the project.

The notes from the third session, which were sent out in advance of this meeting, were made available at this time. Teresa and Brent suggested that perhaps this project could incorporate involvement with the construction of a Habitat for Humanity house. The thought was to partner young people with adults experienced in traditional trades such as carpentry, electrical and plumbing. Teresa elaborated on the need for mentoring in the community. She feels that there is a serious shortage of men willing to work with at-risk boys. Another suggested activity was to collaborate with nursing homes for the elderly, and community organizations supporting people with handicaps.

The group began to construct the grant proposal envisioning what they felt was needed without any fiscal restraints. Concentrating on descriptive aspects of the proposal, it was decided to use the mission statement that was collaboratively developed in Session 3 for the “Purpose” section:

*This project is based on a paid summer work program for inner-city teenagers who don't have anything else to do. To accomplish this mission we will have locally developed programs that recruit members through truancy programs developing better citizens and community members. These projects will have support and oversight building leadership with retirees and young people studying in the social service professions.*

The kids will do a variety of work from street cleanup and gardening to graffiti cleaning and mural projects. An additional educational component will be developed supporting the work they will be doing including field trips and onsite job training.

The second bullet in the preparation section of the grant template inquired about the “Scope” of the project. A spirited discussion emerged concerning the ratio of adults to teenagers. Teresa suggested one adult for every two teens. Her rationale was that these would be the most challenging kids to work with, and that two months wasn't much time

to have an impact. There was a lot of concern expressed about the difficulties inherent in working with this population, and a decision was made to target a ratio of one adult to four teens. The targeted use of volunteers could bring down the ratio down closer to one to one if need be. Also under the scope of work, it was decided to target one neighborhood and to focus on a total of eighty students. This would mean recruiting around 20 university students and at least 20 volunteers.

Ideas about how the students might be compensated were interwoven with the dialogue about the scope of the project. The concepts of a stipend and scholarship reemerged, as well as a new notion to try and arrange college credit for student participation. It was suggested that an arrangement could be made with a cooperating university faculty member to administer a series of perhaps three courses per summer around this type of service learning. Perhaps scholarships could be obtained just for this purpose.

The group was concerned about project oversight, wanting to insure that in the event it did proceed, there would be follow-through on all aspects of the proposal. Through dialogue, a vision of a management hierarchy surfaced. With the direction of board of directors, a project manager would be hired to help organize, coordinate and arrange the different activities. This could be an AmeriCorps participant or a person with specific skills in community organizing or project management. Each group of 5-8 teens would have a student group leader who always stayed with that particular group of teens. Camilla suggested that each of the four or five major activities envisioned (which are subject to change) could have an activity leader. This would be someone who stays with an activity such as gardening, to oversee the groups of teens that might rotate through the activity at different times. These activity leaders could change roles periodically. The



volunteers could be placed with the teen groups in mentorship positions, or used as specialists, staying with a particular activity.

The group reconfirmed that the teens should be paid monthly by stipend and be required to adhere to firm punctuality, attendance and behavior guidelines. It was also decided that encouraging communication and dialogue between the teens and the caring adults in their lives was an important component of the project. It was suggested that a weekly series of three to five questions could be developed by the group leaders and then addressed daily with the students. The Caring adults could be encouraged to ask these questions periodically during a week. The questions could inquire about the actual work these young people are doing, other training, the community impact of their work, and the personal impact.

Several more elements of the project surfaced in this part of the dialogue. It seemed important to the group to build in time for recognition, planning and project evaluation. Everyone involved with the project would participate in these elements in different ways. This would include neighborhood groups, educational institutions, city departments, as well as the volunteers, project leaders and teens. The underlying current of these activities should be to include all perspectives in shaping the development of a sustainable project model. Perhaps representatives of the teens, and the leaders/volunteers could attend neighborhood meetings to become part of the regular agenda and to solicit feedback.

After a short break, the group process of writing continued. Prior to completing the grant proposal and dispersing for the final time, I asked "If this process changed you in any way and if so how?" Lenny spoke up saying "As far as I'm concerned it's like we

started with a puzzle and we're all different shapes and sizes, and slowly but surely we've put it together and we have a whole picture..."

Brent offered this observation:

It's given me a lot of reflection on growing up... if we wouldn't have had this I wouldn't have recognized all these small little pieces. You know that... the state has already done some project that was actually helpful to a lot of people, and how come they're not still doing it?

Camilla said "I think it has helped me to understand better, what is going on. I think it is going to be a good project if we all work hard."

Teresa remarked:

... [this] is not one fascist idea of how it should be... As long as we have a combination, to me, we have more of a sound, working program.... [this discussion] reminds me of all the things we take for granted. It has helped me back to reality.

Marisa was preoccupied with word processing but did suggest that "I would never have gone for a grant.

**Figure 13 Corporation for Public Broadcasting generic grant proposal (abridged)**

**Preparation**

You are likely to find preliminary grant writing steps to be the most time consuming, yet most vital aspect of the process. If done well, your preparatory work will simplify the writing stage.

**Define your project**

Clarify the purpose of your project and write a concise mission statement.

Define the scope of work to focus your funding search.

Determine the broad project goals, then identify the specific objectives that define how you will focus the work to accomplish those goals.

**1. Narratives**

**Statement of need**

Purpose, goals, measurable objectives, and a compelling, logical reason why the proposal should be supported. Background provides perspective and is often a welcome component.

**Approach**

Method and process of accomplishing goals and objectives, description of intended scope of

work with expected outcomes, outline of activities, description of personnel functions with names of key staff and consultants, if possible.

**Method of evaluation**

Some require very technical measurements of results. Inquire about expectations.

**Project timeline**

Paints a picture of project flow that includes start and end dates, schedule of activities, and projected outcomes. Should be detailed enough to include staff selection and start dates.

**Tips on Writing the Narrative:**

Narratives typically must satisfy the following questions:

What do we want?

What concern will be addressed and why it is important?

Who will benefit and how?

What specific objectives can be accomplished and how?

How will results be measured?

How does this funding request relate to the funders purpose, objectives, and priorities?

Who are we (organization, independent producer) and how do we qualify to meet this need?

## *The Loss of the Middle Class*

### *Session 1*

The group codes that were developed for the *Loss of the Middle Class* theme were arranged across the center of the table where participants could easily view them from their seats. Several participants arrived early and began helping arrange the room. The rest of the group arrived individually over a period of 20 minutes.

As members of the group introduced themselves and settled in, the conversation focused in on what was going on at the plant and what plans people had made about work. Four of the participants planned to stay with the plant until it closed while also looking at the possibilities for transfers to other plants as they come up. Monte had accepted a buyout package in the fall and was immediately rehired as a temporary worker making about 25% less in wages with no health benefits. Richard had accepted a bridge to retirement package in which he received 85% of his base pay, for roughly two years, until he was eligible for his full retirement. He was lined up to work seasonally for his local municipality doing park maintenance for extra money, and something to do.

As each person's situation was revealed, the dialogue turned to the company and the poor decisions made by the leadership. Some participants pointed to ridiculous compensation packages taken by the upper management. Others suggested that management's inability to listen to the workers made progress impossible. The dialogue shifted to the possible toxic waste cleanup facing potential buyers of the production facility, and the possibility that tax dollars through the federal superfund might very well be used to clean up the site. The suggestion was that using tax dollars in this way forced a competition between allowing corporations to walk away from their responsibilities,

and providing potential services to regular people. Rick suggested that the ongoing war in Iraq was having similar consequences as a drain on middle class and working class public support.

After the participants had settled in, and these initial discussions came to a natural pause, I opened a discussion about the generative theme *The Loss of the Middle Class*. I reminded them of the goal of envisioning a project to address this theme. Reviewing the preconditions for dialogue (which I had asked them specifically to read ahead of time) I made sure that each of them had a copy in front of them and gave them a moment to re-read them. Instead of writing them on the board I simply said each of the main phrases out loud, pausing between each and asking if there were any questions. We went through value and respect, knowledge is fluid, positive possibilities, unfinished projects, and critical thinking very quickly with no substantive comments or questions. I spoke briefly about Paulo Freire's literacy projects and the role of dialogue plays in the work of transformation.

I proposed an action/reflection process to help guide the participants in making decisions and planning the work ahead. Reflecting on the short discussion that had just taken place, Richard offered that the loss of jobs in the country had a direct effect on the economy. I wrote, "Job loss leading to poverty/ loss of the middle class" on the white board and asked what direction this statement might lead our discussion.

Monte wanted to discuss the topic of "personal responsibility," which he connected with the ideas of respect for others and community values. He feels these are in short supply these days. This line of thought quickly shifted to the relationship between the workers at this assembly plant and the local business community, in the wake of announcements that the plant will be closing. Monte brought up the impression

that the business community didn't seem to have much of a stake in the production facility. He wasn't sure whether this was the result of the assembly workers not going out of their way to patronize these local businesses, or whether it was due to a lack of understanding on the part of the businesses, regarding the long-term impact of losing the plant. Rick brought up the issue of lost tax base. Brennan spoke about a recently published study that suggested that traffic would increase significantly if housing replaced manufacturing on the site.

Brenan wondered how this group could change the attitudes of people in the community. He gave the example of people within his faith community, who participated in the rituals of the church, but didn't practice the social responsibilities that the religion espoused.

The dialogue shifted toward a discussion on race and racism. Barbara brought up the issue of different incarceration rates between whites and blacks. Monte suggested that the blacks born in other countries and coming to the United States are hungry for jobs, and don't seem to have the "slave mentality" that grips so many black people in this country. Demetrius spoke about the relentless media messages and negative black stereotypes he experienced growing up in the sixties and seventies. He feels it is even worse today. "They say you're bad, you're bad, you're bad eventually you are going to be bad."

As the connection between these cultural stereotypes and employment surfaced, a debate about the value of low paying fast food jobs ensued. Rick and Brennan suggested that these jobs were a dead end and very exploitative. Though Demetrius strongly advocates for living wage union jobs, he disagreed that these low wage, low skill jobs are undesirable. He suggested that high school aged kids need part-time work like this to give

them some job experience and some “sneaker money” in their pockets. As well, seniors on fixed incomes often need part time jobs to supplement Social Security.

The dialogue shifted to the detrimental effects that fast food has had on our society, including the proliferation of diabetes and high blood pressure. Monte suggested that someone working two jobs would have no patience and eat terribly. Richard agreed and feels that this is where there is a seam of profit in the strained economy. People working two marginal jobs and stressed to make ends meet end up making costly purchasing decisions, like eating out much of the time.

During a 10 minute break, some people began to discuss the codes that were arranged across the table. When we reconvened I encouraged the group to continue this discussion. Pointing to the code he had put together with a picture of a foreclosure with furniture and clothes strewn across the sidewalk, and another picture of a pickup truck filled with belongings and a caption saying “What Now?” Richard asked “When taxpayers lose their jobs what’s the outcome?”

Brenda suggested that Richard’s code really represented much of the loss people are experiencing today. Through the foreclosure process, “They didn’t get everything in that truck. You know I added on to it.” Brennan wanted to know where the truck was going, as it seemed to have no destination.

Monte wove Brennan’s code, which shows a lone person walking down a desolate highway, together with Richard’s. “You have a breakdown in the community, and everyone is going in different directions; and what’s next? They are both going down different avenues but going nowhere.”

Brenda pointed to Brennan’s code and added “And the repo man got everything: the foreclosure, the truck; and now he’s got nothing.” She spoke about her code where

she is pictured at a bus stop in professional clothing holding a sign that says in part “Seeking work ...” indicating that professionals are having problems finding work these days, similar to those who are visibly out on the street seeking food for work.

Demetrius talked a bit about the code he had thought up having to do with Wal-Mart. He had suggested that they put a sign up in front of the assembly plant (where they have been working) saying, “Coming soon”.

Monte described his vision of a code, which was to stand in front of a new Explorer with his coveralls and fingerless production gloves on, with some kind of implication that he could no longer afford what he was making. Rick agreed that this was a huge piece of the loss the middle class was suffering.

After the code discussion concluded, I brought up the idea of looking to a horizon. Looking to see what should be happening, a person can step back with this perspective to discover the work to be done to get there. Constructing a project would then be about tackling some of that work. I introduced the concept of “heterotopia” by talking about “limit situations” and how they can obstruct the view to a hopeful horizon. If a person could suspend their own disbelief, actually shifting his perspective enough to get a clear view of the “Ought to be”( Horton, 1990).

Nearing the end of the first session, I suggested that we set some action steps for the next meeting. The group decided to spend some time at the beginning of the next session defining what the desirable horizon should look like. At the very end of the session, Monte asked the group if anyone had information on what effect crime in a surrounding area has on education in that area. I offered to try and obtain some information.



*Session 2*

The session began late, with Monte, Brennan, Richard and Rick all arriving by 12:40, 10 minutes after the scheduled beginning time. Barbara arrived about 10 minutes later. Demetrius was absent for the meeting. Since not everyone was present at the beginning, we began the session informally by looking at some information that Monte had requested articles and published reports on crime and education in Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

The group began to focus on schools. Monte suggested that the politics surrounding school boards make them highly ineffective, with a group of non-educators telling people in education how to run the schools. Rick spoke about an acquaintance that he has who sits on a local school board but who has no interest in “Those children” the very ones they are supposed to serve. Brennan observed that school boards are supposed to be responsible for the education of the children; yet they are always looking for great administrators who seem to be driven by cutting budgets.

Richard spoke about the anti-public school sentiment in this country:

Ever since World War II with the assault on the trade union movement, there's been an equally vicious, irrational, psychotic assault on the public education system. Teachers Unions are the worst villains in the world. They just promote greed. Schools are incompetent, teachers are bad and they don't care. Then we bring in the private sector... and they find out they still have the same problems and they handle them worse than the old administrators... This assault on education is by people who want it to fail and fail in the worst way... I used to think it was just my paranoid thinking, but in the past few years it's really become obvious.

Monte followed up on that idea, “I think it is interesting that we used to live in a meritocracy, but now someone can say I just cut the budget so your kids can't have books and you need to pay me for that.”

Brennan made the suggestion that a national search for school superintendents takes the community out of system. “I can’t see how hard it is, to find someone in the community to be a superintendent. Whether it’s someone you want to do financial cuts or somebody who is concerned with education...”

There was a brief discussion about the prevalence of standardized testing, and then the dialogue shifted to training on the job at the Assembly plant. The participants brought up many ways that they had learned jobs. The official way is to read a form that was filled out by the previous operator on that job, followed by guided practice for several hours with someone familiar with the job. For a host of reasons, the form was not considered a meaningful tool for learning the job, though according to policy it was the primary way.

There was a natural break in the dialogue, and I took the opportunity to direct the discussion toward reflection and then action. In the previous session we had agreed to reflect a bit and then spend some time looking to the horizon to see how things should be. Rick started off with a comment that he was impressed that, amid all of the cynicism about the loss of the middle class, the group seemed very full of hope. Brennan reminded the group of his somewhat rhetorical question to the group, “How do we change attitudes?”

Barbara told the group that, after the first session, she had taken steps to begin volunteering as an advocate with her local elementary school. She described her first meeting with a school counselor and was amazed at the needs of elementary children. She was very proud to have actually followed through with something she had thought about doing for many years.

I asked the group to identify the main ideas that had been brought up so far for a project. Two main ideas emerged, a mentoring project, and developing living wage jobs in the community. Rick spun a third thread into the mix by suggesting that the group push the angle that these two ideas could be linked to the concept of responsible tax spending. This tied back to the discussion around the plant closing and the loss of tax revenue for both the state and the city.

Brennan brought up the fact that the infrastructure of the country was falling apart. Monte spoke about the toll roads in and around Chicago being in terrible shape. His impression was that the roads generated plenty of revenue to keep them in premier shape, but that the owners are raising tolls now to supposedly gain the money to fix them.

This thread compelled Barbara to say, “Developing organizations to get the community active is one thing, I want to know if people can bring about change themselves... to be motivated to do this on their own.”

Both Rick and Monte suggested that if the community could do it on their own, they would have done it. Barbara suggested that whatever kind of project the group developed, it should include some kind of advertising component, something to stimulate motivation from within.

There was a brief discussion about who in a community should participate in a project with kids. The question was raised as to whether or not felony background checks would have to be applied to a project involving kids. Richard wondered what it would actually screen out. Rick thought it might be good to eliminate serious offenders. Barbara felt that if the offense didn't involve hurting someone, particularly a child, then that shouldn't eliminate a convicted felon from participating. Monte thought that if the offense included drug dealing or delivering prostitution, that these were not the sort of

trades that young kids should be exposed to through this program. Both Richard and Barbara suggested that if it had been a number of years since a conviction, and if the person was straight and wanted to help the community, they should be allowed. Barbara half jokingly suggested that someone who once spent time dealing at the street level might have good practical math skills to teach a young person.

Monte brought up the idea for a model that might resemble Big Brothers and Big Sisters. The basic concept would be that the project would link volunteer mentors from the broader community to an individual participant within a targeted neighborhood. Barbara suggested that it could be an uncle, or a neighbor, or a friend of the family. In that way, perhaps, the background checks could be eliminated altogether, and the function of the project could more closely represent what might be created naturally in a community. The purpose of such a project would be to stimulate and support what could naturally occur with more resources. This tension between the idea of people coming from the outside, versus people emerging from within a community generated a lot of group energy, however, at this point it remained unresolved.

Monte pulled together these two ideas by starting with the observation “We not only have the loss of the middle class, but we have a real loss of the family.” He suggested that perhaps this group could pull together very different constituencies around the family in order to not only help kids directly, but to build an infrastructure to advocate for families who have no voice. Bringing representatives from corporations and local businesses together with concerned adults from within the community would put people on the same page, and get a lot of people seeing what is really going on. In this way people who might have a better chance at making systemic change could put together more effective proposals to take to local or state government.

Barbara brought up the idea of getting ticket donations from organizations such as the local professional sports teams and theater companies. This built on an idea that Monte had proposed earlier, that a project might include a mixture of community service and fun field trips. Rick added that retail companies that operated within the community should donate for operating expenses.

The dialogue shifted to a long discussion about the concepts that have come to be known as “Fordism”, and how, with loss of middle class living wage jobs, the consumer society is losing its ability to sustain itself. This touched upon CEO compensation and the effect a real minimum wage might have in this country. Everyone seemed to agree that the minimum wage had never really represented a living wage. Several people commented on the increase in hours per week everyone seemed to be working, and the perception that people are not gaining by this.

Richard brought up the recent emergence of ethanol plant subsidies from the Federal government. Monte added that the corn used to make it was really expensive to grow, compared to other organic materials that could be used. Brennan expressed his outrage that fuel was now competing with food and driving up the price of corn on the world markets. Richard tied this discussion into the broader issue of a sustainable economy and buying locally. Monte suggested that fast food chains probably don't use local products. Rick spoke about how difficult it was to find local products in the big grocery stores, except in the height of the growing and harvest season for vegetables.

After a 10 minute break, we resumed this discussion. Rick brought up a recent local news report about people in rural areas just letting their horses go free because they can neither sell them nor give them away. He mentioned that the three slaughterhouses that used to accept horses are now out of business.

At this natural break, I suggested that the group reflect a while and then create some action steps for the next hour. I observed that the group had developed the two ideas of a mentorship program run by a nonprofit and that they would like to see this nonprofit involved in community building and doing some work on sustainable jobs. A third element, responsible taxation, was not further developed since it was first introduced. I asked the group how the discussion seemed to be going, was it paced well, did everyone get a chance to express their ideas? There was tacit agreement that things were going well and that we should proceed.

Richard asked for a definition of action step, and I explained that it was a step or a series of steps we would take to move us toward the horizon that we wanted to see. I gave examples, from choosing topics the group wanted or needed to discuss, to developing questions and finding answers to those inquiries, by physically getting up and going to talk with someone, making a phone call, or writing a letter. What would be the next things we would do for the following hour and beyond that if we chose?

Brennan wanted to try to construct a mission statement for the project. He had looked up some models during the two weeks between sessions. Rick suggested that you would need to include an objective or a goal. Brennan had found two distinct types of mission statements. One was very briefly stating the objective of the project in the broadest terms. The other type seemed to be more directed toward people and organizations that might fund, or be interested in collaborating with such a project. We began to brainstorm the other elements that should be in this statement, such as a goal, the target population, a brief description of the process or form the project might take in achieving the goal, and some way to evaluate the success of the project. I wrote these on the white board.

Barbara asked what a community-centered jobs program project might look like? Rick offered that it could be a group of people going to the state and the city to try and keep the automotive plant open. Monte suggested that if we linked it to a mentoring program in a place like North Minneapolis, then the group would have to look into connecting with the local businesses. Developing this thread a bit more, he thought that if there was a struggling Subway in the neighborhood, the group could partner with the business in several ways. Perhaps in the beginning, the group could get a discount from the company, and as the group became more robust, they could pay more instead of less to the sandwich shop. Brennan suggested that the group could work out a trade in advertising. Monte thought, too, that if the Subway needed workers, some of the participants in the mentorship program could work there after school. Since they might be involved in the mentorship program on the weekends, it might give them some structured after-school activities.

I suggested that the group might also think of supporting startup companies that are interested in bringing living-wage jobs and sustainable industry into a target neighborhood. Monte thought that three-wheeled utility bikes might be a good project. This line of thinking lead Brennan to say “It comes down to profit, and that’s why companies move. Its not because they aren’t making money ...its because they can make more and its irresponsible.”

I offered the idea of worker-owned industry and described what a cooperative workplace might look like. The first example I used was a group of workers making decisions about what to do with surplus money generated during a year of production. They could either take a bonus, or invest in a new machine that they could use to become more efficient. Monte was a bit incredulous about democratization of the work place. I

described briefly the work at Zanon Ceramics, an expropriated company in Argentina, taken over by the workers when the owner locked them out and left the country. They use elected representatives to handle the daily decisions, and then once a month they meet as a whole plant for an entire day to make strategic decisions.

Brennan revealed that he was involved in a class for entrepreneurial businesses, and had just written a mission statement the night before. Since it was the first major assignment in his class, he felt it made sense to start with one in this group. Monte began the process with a sentence packed with the words "... making this community a better place socially, economically, and politically stable and sustainable". He felt the mentoring piece was embedded in the word social, the startup companies and collaboration with businesses was captured by the word "economy," and for the word "political," there was the work of getting funding for this project through the potential community and economic development monies. As Monte pointed out, there might be a good deal of lobbying at the city and state levels for funding.

The dialogue shifted into a discussion around the tension between a project that was directed by volunteers, versus one that developed funding for a paid staff that would both coordinate the volunteer activities in the field, and connect the project to businesses and government representatives. The group agreed that the project should include the element of paid staff.

Barbara asked if a group could apply for a grant before actually getting a project going, or whether the project would have to be established and functioning before the funding might be available. Rick suggested that:

You have to come up with a reasonable and good and viable proposal. They look to see if you have experience in that area. For instance if you wanted to do a community based mentoring idea, they would love the fact that you had



some association in the past with Big Brothers, Big Sisters or something like that. So you've worked with an established organization and you know what's good and what's bad about that. And that's part of your proposal, your work experience and your knowledge in that area.

Brenda said, "We don't have that.... But we have a lot of other experience between us".

Rick thought that we probably did have some experience among us. I suggested that we not let experience keep us from pushing ahead with this idea. Monte said that he had participated in an outreach program run by the University of Chicago called the Institute for Athletics and Education. He credits the program with helping him think about going to college, and ultimately providing him with the opportunity to attend the University of Chicago. As part of the program, the high school students tutored middle school students.

I brought up the idea of partnering with organizations in the community, for both support in obtaining funding from granters, and also to act as fiscal agents for the project.

The dialogue turned to defining the population the project would serve. The group brought up the tension between serving the people who were at the age where they were at high risk for dropping out of school or getting involved in illegal activity, and trying to connect with them earlier, before they found themselves at risk. Barbara suggested starting with middle school aged kids. Rick said that he knew some people who had participated in a big brothers program who started interacting with the kids in third or fourth grade. One of these relationships carried on for decades and is still ongoing.

Monte thought that he really could have used some help with a mentor for a couple of years when he was around seventeen years old. There was general agreement that a program would be more effective if it started with younger kids and stayed with

them as they grew to adults. Monte posed the rhetorical question that if they started with six year olds, then aren't they giving up on the kids seven and older? Rick countered that a project would have to start somewhere. He also pointed out his feeling that boys develop later than girls, and they might hit one gender effectively and miss the other.

Barbara's son was matched with an older student in a school program and that connection stayed with her son into adulthood. She thought that it had left a lasting impression on him, and felt that he is ready to volunteer himself as a mentor. Barbara also brought up that she was a person who her son's friends could always talk to. If they had problems that they couldn't talk to their own parents about, she was always there. Since her son is now grown and has moved away, she misses those connections, and it is part of her motivation for becoming a mentor.

Richard thought it would be better to start "... before the hormones kick in". Monte posed the issue that starting earlier would make it more difficult to show results, because it would take a long time. Barbara suggested that if the kids stayed with the program, then that would show success.

The dialogue shifted across several tensions around the idea of who could participate. Rick was trying to come up with a guideline, something along the order of an adult working with a young person aged 10-17 who didn't live in the house with the child. Brennan asked if it could be any adult, any child, plus a friend? There were no objections. Barbara said that the group goal should be to get adults and kids involved with one another. She felt that the main thrust of the project should be an effective advertising campaign supporting this goal. Rick held firm to the idea that the group needed to serve a target population with some specified interventions and activities. His main concern was that granting agencies would need to see these elements in order to

support the project. Barbara said “Well lets just advertise here (at the plant) with ‘Mentor a kid and get free tickets to the Vikings.’” Monte objected pointing out that many people at the plant would simply pretend to do something for free tickets putting the focus on the wrong thing.

Monte tried a new direction, with the idea of pleasing three of the main constituents, the parents, the kids, and the project staff. He suggested that if the kids had structure on the weekends such as projects to do during the day, and perhaps a game or performance to see on a non-school night, then it would keep them out of trouble. He felt the parents would be happy if they could drop their kids off or “loose this kid from nine to five on a Saturday”. A single parent could get errands done.

Monte also felt it would be important to have a central base of operations where the mentors and mentees could meet such as a community center. It would make planning for activities such as field trips more efficient. Brennan described existing drop off centers in the metropolitan area called Safety Centers, places where estranged parents can visit their children under court approved supervision.

Several participants commented that the three hours seemed to pass quickly, and it was time to end. Barbara brought the discussion back to her main point that she wanted responsible adults to take it upon themselves to mentor a child. We set the time for the next meeting to be held in two weeks.

### *Session 3*

Four of the six participants arrived and settled in. The informal discussion moved from the presidential campaign, to the North American Free Trade Agreement and former President Bill Clinton’s role in exporting jobs. The future of the plant came up again, around rumors that a group of investors were interested in keeping it a manufacturing

facility. A tension began to emerge between Demetrius and Brennan during this informal discussion. Brennan was attempting to confront what he saw as being a negativity or cynicism in Demetrius' response to investors' interest in the plant. Demetrius asked whether they were from Japan or China and linked this possibility to an instance that he remembered where Nissan purchased a plant in the U.S. and cut wages and benefits. Rick arrived and the tension dissipated. We proceeded at this point without Barbara.

We started by reflecting on what had been discussed during the previous session. What had emerged at the end of the last session were the beginnings of a mission statement, outlining a three-pronged approach to the project. The first was a mentoring program linking kids in the community with adults from those neighborhoods, and possibly adult volunteers from the broader community. These mentorship relationships could be with two people who are related to each other like an uncle and a nephew, it could include a friend, or it might be between two unrelated individuals.

The second prong was developing a link to local businesses. These businesses could provide support of the project through direct donations or discounts. The group could provide advertising support in return. Another idea was to provide a connection between the business and the community for the purpose of developing a conduit for local kids and adults to become employed in living wage and sustainable jobs by these businesses. There was also a third idea to advocate for resources to support local communities under the umbrella of responsible tax spending.

At this point Monte announced that he had done some brainstorming and would put it in front of the group as a way of accelerating this process. Brennan stood up, picking up a white board marker, saying that he would put it in the form of a resolution.

The resolution began with Brennan's words, "Whereas there are no jobs available, and disenfranchised families resulting from disconnected family unions." Monte called this a lack of family structure. He added the phrases "Whereas there exists an economic disparity...and I want to say a lack of political participation". Demetrius countered this statement saying that he felt the voter turnout in North Minneapolis was good. He feels the Media is responsible for our perception that people don't participate.

The dialogue shifted and focused on issues surrounding political participation. Rick brought up that voting was a very broad idea. People vote for city council, school board member, and the national level. They all have to do with resources coming back to the community in some way. He then brought up a recent Public Broadcasting System airing of the program "Now". The interviewer found a whole group of blue color workers who had voted for the conservative in the last election but now were very unhappy with the candidate they had voted for. Several participants brought up the idea that even people who participate in the electoral process are often not represented in city councils or State Legislatures by the people they help elect. I inserted the words class interest into this conversation as well as the ideological paradigms of voting along perceived racial or religious lines.

Brennan had the white board marker in his hand and was standing at the whiteboard. He steered the group back to writing whereas statements. Demetrius suggested the idea that there was voter apathy. Brennan assailed Demetrius directly, claiming that this was exactly opposite of the statement that people in North Minneapolis had good participation in voting. Demetrius countered with the idea that even though they vote, people don't see the schools getting any better, or their communities becoming stronger. Brennan further challenged Demetrius personally saying "I felt you were talking

down to me earlier”. Demetrius calmly replied that he never talked down to anyone, and that he was just trying to get caught up after missing the second session.

Monte felt it was important to have a political statement that included at least some aspect of political disparity. He said that he wasn’t sure how to get there. Brennan suggested just putting the words political disparity in the “whereas” statement, and that it would work itself out. Monte agreed as did several other people in the group.

Richard had been quietly writing ideas down during the discussion and offered them as an extension to the “whereas” statements. He read them out loud. “We have to create through community action, a community standard of living that will provide the basics, food, shelter... fueled by fair and safe employment that is sustainable.”

Brennan didn’t write any of this down, but said for Richard to keep them handy for the next steps. Monte suggested Identifying problems that were confronting a neighborhood like north Minneapolis as a way of determining need. Demetrius offered that the main problems in north Minneapolis were confined to a rather small geographical area. Within that area, the major problem seemed to be too much absentee landlord rental properties.

Brennan brought the discussion back to political participation, and the idea of political disparity. Rick brought up two points, the first, that people might vote and be disappointed, and the second was the effect of single issue politics such as abortion might have on a place like north Minneapolis. Monte suggested that voting at the national level was often like “Voting for the devil or his brother”. People will make the best choice, but not a good one. He added that people vote for candidates that they perceive are like them in looks, or from a close geographic location.

Darius said that he hated to be so negative, but he feels that these neighborhoods have been "... Getting a bum rap all these years. And its not just north Minneapolis, its Gary Indiana, Chicago, Detroit now." The issue is really jobs and economics. Because Detroit is so "labor intensive" as a manufacturing center, when the jobs go the foreclosure rate escalates, as do desperation and violence.

I stepped in to attempt to bridge what seemed to me to be a small gap in emphasis. I pointed out that the "whereas" statements already included the economic disparity piece. I suggested that everyone seemed to agree that in neighborhoods like north Minneapolis, public dollars were not being re-invested wisely or effectively. Monte agreed that this is what the political disparity means, "That we have politicians who aren't focused on the neighborhood and dollars aren't being reinvested."

Brennan didn't write any of this down either, but confirmed that I had taken notes. He suggested to the group that the mission statement should address the needs of the investors in this project, spell out what is in it for them. Monte quipped, "Why is this neighborhood worth investing in?" Brennan replied "Exactly"

Rick reflecting back on what was articulated during the second session put together "To try to create some sort of a mentoring program...to help align responsible adults with children before they become irresponsible in order to foster a sense of community." With this sense of community, there would be a connection to jobs and community building. Monte, Rick, and Richard agreed. Brennan sensed that Demetrius was not agreeing to this and called on him directly. At this point Brennan's facilitation seemed to be polarizing the differences between Demetrius and the rest of the group.

Demetrius spoke about his north metro suburb that he suggested was mainly white with a small black minority and almost no Latino/Latinas. There is a chain Mexican fast

food restaurant popular in the metro area, located in this suburb. Demetrius summed up the problem this way. “Yet the whole store is Hispanic. High school students can’t get a job there. Senior citizens can’t get a job there... They don’t serve the community... They’re not good neighbors I should say.” He went on to point out that senior citizens might call in sick more, and that high school kids might be more prone to walk out on a poor paying demanding job, “... But if they get an immigrant from a Third World Country ... that’s the most money they ever made. They’re sending money home, they’re pooling their resources to get to the next level, they can’t afford to miss a day of work and they won’t.”

His point was that this wasn’t fair to the person who lived in that community and helped make that store prosper. Monte asked if he were an employer, whom he would rather hire. Demetrius suggested that any immigrant, “...from Russia or anywhere else, with questionable paperwork” would be inline for those jobs, and allow the retailer to pay poor wages with no benefits. He said “Its all about money”.

Rick asked if you could politically regulate such a thing. He felt that while he would be willing to stand and picket such a restaurant, he didn’t think we could illicit funding to do this overtly. Eventually he was able to tie a process of forging relationships with retailers to the proposed mentorship segment of the project. He was still concerned that this group could not take on everything as eight people in this room.

Monte put forth the idea that “We’re trying to foster greater community responsibility...on the part of local businesses, but also in the mentoring program on the part of citizens.” Rick wanted to make sure that the group focused on working locally, and everyone agreed. He also wanted the group to narrow the focus to the specific constituents of the project. The group spent several minutes circling around this issue.



Monte finally suggested that perhaps the project could develop professional mentors, paid to work with these kids. He proposed developing mentors from community members who had a “sketchy past”, perhaps not very employable, and not a threat to the kids in any way.

On that note Brennan asked for a break. When everyone returned, the dialogue turned to immigration. Rick described a friend who runs a horse stable, and hires exclusively seasonal workers on temporary work visas. These immigrant workers receive housing and some form of medical insurance through their work. Demetrius asked why this person couldn't hire local kids or seniors to do this work. He suggested that it has been “proven time and time again that seniors are the most loyal (consistent) employees.”

Monte proposed the idea that in order to impact illegal immigration, you have to effectively close the border and then effectively remove those that are here:

If you look at these problems in a realistic way, you have to stop them from getting in and then you have to deal with the ones who are already here. Otherwise, let's say we transported, like (President) Bush was talking about one time, taking the 20 million illegal immigrants here and shipping them right back across the border. Well as soon as you open up the bus door, they all start scrambling back across. They're back before dinner gets cold.

Brennan asked if there might be some moral ground to persuade the US to boost Mexico's economy. Demetrius said “Stop exploiting them”. Rick suggested closing the truck plant here and starting to build them in Mexico. Though this appeared to be a cynical remark, it has actually begun happening. Rick suggested that this is how globalization is taking shape. There is a truck plant in Mexico, as well as a new one in Thailand. Monte suggested in a joking voice that the U.S. should annex Mexico as the 51<sup>st</sup> state implying that this would end our illegal immigration problem. Though he appeared to be half hearted about this idea, it seemed apparent that this was not the first

time he had proposed this concept. Brennan and Rick pointed out that Mexico had its own illegal immigration problem, and that this would simply replace the one we were currently facing. Demetrius put out the idea that farmers in Mexico were doing all right before the North American Free Trade Act was implemented, but now many farms have disappeared.

The dialogue swung back to defining “at risk kids”. Several people in the group had been focusing the particular geographic location of north Minneapolis while others were gently resisting creating a project that could only serve this one place. Demetrius pointed out that suburban kids could be “at risk” due to a lack of parental love. He said that Bill Gates’ kids were probably “bad as hell”. Rick thought that it was clear that the brutality of poverty created situations where some kids were truly at risk of falling into prostitution for example. The group finally decided to use the word children.

Brennan said that he wanted to add the idea of supporting adult employment in the mission statement. Half jokingly he said that he was going to try to do it in a way that Rick wouldn’t notice. Rick simply smiled and said “Your clouding the water” and let it go. Brennan turned to Richard and asked for statement he had not used earlier. Richard bashfully strung his thoughts together:

Create through community action, a community standard of living that will provide the basics, Health [care], food, shelter, education, fair and safe employment in a sustainable manner, with a high level of local participation.

Rick thought that fair and safe employment covered Brennan’s issue about employment. Richard said that hopefully “some people could make money and not spend all their time working so that they can get involved in the community”.

Brennan said:

What I want... we want north Minneapolis to take care of north Minneapolis... Its weird for me to see, especially white women, but white people coming into north Minneapolis and helping out these communities, ... its like they're saying I am this great person ...lowering myself to help these people.

Monte replied:

I get what you're saying; the condescending approach. I get it. But let us look at the history of America. The whole freeing the slaves, that didn't happen until ... white people said... our country isn't going to survive.... You have to have people who are part of the system change the system. Otherwise you just have loose nuts and bolts outside of the machine that can be swept up.

Monte went on to say that civil rights and voting rights changes had to come from within the system. Several points were brought up around these and Brennan's statements. Demetrius pointed out that the Jewish community and the white college kids who went south to register voters had a common goal. They all wanted change because they all felt persecuted. Richard pointed out that they knew that they needed each other, the basis for solidarity.

Monte continued to make the case for help from the outside. He brought up the idea that people who reach the middle class often leave the neighborhoods they grew up in. Rick pointed out that neighborhoods are constantly changing. The discussion shifted a bit as Brennan told a story of a young man who grew up in north Minneapolis who went to college on a wrestling scholarship. He vowed to come back to teach and coach, and though he did for a year or so, he was now gone from north Minneapolis. Demetrius said that he felt the problem was often that high school principals were often resistant to new people coming in with new ideas. He had seen a documentary on the Bronx in the 1960's recently, describing a movement within the black community to own the neighborhood

schools. He described the movement as being situated around the idea that the people in the neighborhoods wanted to teach their children about themselves and about their community. The subtext seemed to also be that they wanted black teachers from the neighborhood to work and run the schools which were run by predominantly whites from outside the community. The backlash from the school establishment in New York was that the move was anti-Semitic, as many of the teachers in the Bronx at the time were Jewish. The argument from the community was that the schools were failing, and the teachers didn't care because it wasn't their community. Neighborhood ownership was the key.

Brennan brought the group back to the mission statement and they struggled to wordsmith. Richards's statement about a community standard of living resonated with most of the group, but Brennan reasserted Rick's earlier question about the relationship between the project and food shelter and sustainable living wage jobs. After a bit of confusion, Richard and Monte both pointed out that these were middle class characteristics that had been lost in the neighborhood. The project should address these issues in some way if it is really going to attack the loss of the middle class. They nearly reached a consensus that the language should stay in, but Brennan persisted in his questioning. There were several attempts at coming up with a way to move forward. Rick polished up the sentence and inserted a new beginning which read "to create through community action". This mollified several in the group. Monte wondered out loud where the original "Whereas" statements went. Then he asked to reread the original statements to see if anything had been overlooked.

The process of writing as a group stalled completely when Demetrius objected to the word "Mentor". Absent from the last session, where the idea of a mentorship was

fleshed out, he launched into a critique about institutions from outside a community, coming in to fix the community. While a similar topic had been discussed in Session 2, and the group had wrestled a long time with it, Demetrius was determined to express his concerns. The first issue he raised was that communities like north Minneapolis need jobs. Rick led him through the linkages between a mentorship with young people and adults and growing a sense of community ownership on the part of mentee's mentors, and connected local businesses. He concluded with the idea that people within the community would buy a Chipotle franchise and "hire that high school from within the community".

The second issue Demetrius raised was that if the goal is to help kids become productive members of the community, a project would have to start with the parents. He went through a series of scenarios, parents without jobs, kids with no parents stuck inside a disastrous county system, and single parents. At each point, Rick re-negotiated the terrain that the group had covered the previous session. Brennan pleaded with Demetrius, in several different ways, to understand that the intent of the project was aligned with these critiques.

Rick and Demetrius went on in this way going back and forth from summary to critique. Rick suggested "...Creating some sort of community social organization that would work with kids, who are relatively young before high school, and involve them in a number of ... community oriented projects that would cross with local businesses.

Demetrius interjected "Like Junior Achievement and Four H." Rick responded:

Kind of but it could even be more vague than that... With Junior Achievement you have to go and start a business, that's not what we're talking about. Local community businesses that are in existence, bringing them into working with [this group]. So those kids meet those local businesses, and those businesses meet those local kids to create that substance of community so that when you do things together you're doing it more in a community aspect. We talked

about free sports tickets and stuff like that to give people an incentive to work together.

Demetrius said “That’s the problem I have... you always need a carrot and stick approach if you’re living in the city. You always have to give them something in order for them to do something right.” Rick responded:

Here’s what we were trying to do, to offset the cost of doing some sort of involvement with the child so that ... adults don’t have a huge financial responsibility to mentor these kids. That could be mowing a neighbors lawn, why should the mentor be responsible for paying for all that gas... to help that kid get a sense of understanding that that lady living next to you might be in need of help and you should be aware of that.

Demetrius said:

When I was growing up, I lived in the city all my life, all of a sudden the last fifteen years, where did it go? ... Outside forces, the media and politicians, they took it away. Welfare is the worst goddamn thing that ever happened to mankind.

Brennan, hardly able to contain himself finally spoke out:

... I am very thankful for the welfare system. My Father died when I was 12 years old. If it was not for that welfare system I would not be where I am today. I have a good paying job today because of the welfare system. I’m sick and tired of people saying that the welfare system is bad.

Richard added that “the system isn’t generous enough, and there are too many rules.” At this point nearly everyone was speaking, trying to get his own perspective on welfare across. Monte, talking over everyone, steered the group back to the mentorship aspect of the project and the need to bring in people from the outside. He said that he had had many different kinds of mentors, high school students, college students, and both black and white adult mentors:

The black and white mentors brought totally different things to the table. Both of them well appreciated. The black man, we obviously had more of a kinship... He had a similar point of view... He knew what I was going through in that moment in time. However the white male that was my mentor

also brought a lot to the table. He brought me a new perspective, new ways of looking at the world. New activities. Everyone has something to give.

Demetrius continued to question the motives of the project. Brennan suggested that north Minneapolis was a place without parents taking care of kids. Demetrius just shook his head and said “You just took that to a whole ‘nother level didn’t you.” A few minutes later he followed up with up with:

I think we’re doing the same thing the media is doing. We’re putting a label on North Minneapolis. Sometimes labels are good, they get people motivated, get people going. But ... to me when you hit the North End, it’s all about jobs.

The dialogue moved back into the economic aspects of the project, how to support community centered businesses in the community. Demetrius promoted the idea of putting placards up in businesses that hire locally and pay living wages. Rick asked if Demetrius wanted to create some sort of criteria to judge businesses. Demetrius nodded his head affirmative, and several different group members made suggestions as to how this could be a piece of the project. Rick tried to realign the business aspect of the project with the other components. Demetrius again objected to the word mentorship because it has had such a condescending reputation in the media. I asked if it could be called something else. Monte stated that if the problem was in the reputation of the word it was up to us to make it clear what that word meant for this project. He said we should keep the word because it is the name for what the group is trying to do. Eventually Demetrius capitulated.

The mood of the group was up beat despite having spent more than an hour re-negotiating several aspects of the project with seemingly little change. I wanted Demetrius’ point about bringing in a project from the outside to fix it to stay on the surface for a while, so the group might have an opportunity to address the issue directly

with his perspective. I introduced the word colonizing as a way of expressing this tension. Monte said it would be a very big problem if the group went into a neighborhood and the help wasn't wanted. He constructed a scenario where crime and police response times grow as the density of drug dealing and other illegal activity grow. This leads to people leaving and an increase in abandoned buildings:

Once you have these abandoned buildings then the rapists move in, the child molesters, they snatch you up off the street. There's going to be a long response time in terms of police presence so now ... you can literally get away with murder.

Monte continued, but turned toward defending the project and ones like it:

So this place is getting worse and worse, and the very people who come in to try to clean it up are now being chastised for just using simple words like mentor, or being the wrong color... I mean how do you combat that?

Demetrius described his experience moving to the South Side of Chicago when he was young:

I went to school on the South Side of Chicago, about as far south as you can go... The neighborhood when we moved in was ... about 80% all white. Within 90 days, 90 days, gone! People around there took off. Redlining. Property values went down, stores moved, franchises left. Luckily there was enough left there to maintain community... That's the way it happens, that's the way it is.

Brennan confronted the seemingly hopelessness of this story. "What I'm actually getting out of you, what I perceive your saying is that there is a situation out there in which you do nothing about it."

Demetrius summed up his thinking this way:

Until we, until the United States can get a handle on, until we talk. To me that's what it is. Until we talk about racial issues, bringing people together... we're always going to have this problem. Between the rich and the poor... Groups like this, groups bigger than this need to sit down and get it out.



The debate continued, with Demetrius pointing to large scale structural issues followed by the refrain from Rick, Brennan, and Monte asking, “Then what do we do?” Demetrius focused attention on large corporations like Cub Foods and the concept of community anchors. How devastating it would be if they left a community. He then moved on to the real estate business sector and spoke about the manipulation of redlining and predatory lending practices that need to come to an end.

I intervened at this point to reestablish two of the lines of thinking that were constructed in session 2: the linkage between kids and adults, the connection to local businesses and the community. I added that this project was conceived as one piece of community building, something that could be put into play by this group. I mentioned that the group had worked on the issue of blaming the victim. I suggested that one of Demetrius’s points was that the problem lies in these large structural issues and not with the people of north Minneapolis.

When Rick asked again, “what can we do?” Demetrius suggested getting involved in candidate endorsement practices within the local union. Union members had been excluded from open mike discussions with candidates earlier that day. He suggested that now is the time to make our issues known, because after they are elected, they won’t be listening.

Monte spoke up at this point:

Were trying to get away from this whole, we want President Bush to save our communities or we want Barrak Obama to come in and save north Minneapolis. We’re trying to empower the people of north Minneapolis to save north Minneapolis. We’re little more than a spark to do that... Part of the mentorship program is we would come in and try to set up a community of adults, already in the community to start mentoring kids already in the community. We even got away from the black and white issue, we said if you live there and wanted to help... we’d put them together [with the kids]... We would also be there. None of us live in north Minneapolis. But whether there

are single parent homes, or hemorrhaging the talent, somebody has to do something and it's not being done. The crime rate says that its not being done. All the issues that are going on there says that its not being done. That doesn't say there's anything wrong with Black People or anything wrong geographically with north Minneapolis...

Monte spoke a bit about the process that took place during the past session. When someone objected to an aspect of a proposal, then that person worked to figure out a way to make it better. He pointed out that "Last week we did a whole body of work which has now kind of been shot down because you say mentoring is a problem. What were asking is how do we get around that?"

Demetrius said that we should start by connecting with groups that already exist within the community that serve youth. Becoming a "hub", and helping to bring these groups together sounded like a good idea to the rest of the group.

At this point there were about ten minutes left and I suggested that we pull together to see if there was any group action that might come out of this past session. Monte spoke of being confused about what the mission had become. He felt we had lost our focus. We hadn't gotten to the "How will we do it and how will we know we've done it?"

I asked if anyone felt they could support the revised mission statement. Rick responded by suggesting that we would need quite a bit more detail to obtain funding for such a project. Without the detail he wasn't comfortable with putting his name on it. Brennan stated that he wasn't interested in the project if it abandoned the mentorship component. Monte agreed that he wouldn't support it as it stood.

I asked if people would be willing to meet one more time to clear up the mission and the two remaining questions "How will the work be done, and how will we evaluate the project?" Everyone readily agreed to one more meeting. I committed to sending out

by e-mail, the various versions and aspects of the mission statement that had been documented. Rick also asked for an agenda with time demarcations. I committed to offering a proposed agenda that we could manipulate at the beginning of session 4.

At the very end of the session, Monte asked the group what they thought about his idea of including professional mentors in the project. Brennan was in favor but Rick spoke out against the idea. Monte asked him why. He was afraid of state and local guidelines and legal issues. It would also cost a huge amount of money. The group walked out the door together still deep in the conversation. The last thing that I heard was Monte telling Demetrius about how special this project could be.

#### *Session 4*

The meeting began at ten minutes after 1:00 with Demetrius, Monte, Brennan, Richard and Rick. Barbara was coming from the hospital after a terrible asthma attack. She stopped in briefly on her way home to apologize for not being in shape to participate.

The agenda was accepted and we started to sort through the goal statements that had been sent out after the last meeting. The first on the list was the one Richard had proposed: *To create through community action, a community standard of living that will provide food, shelter, healthcare, education, and fair and safe employment in a sustainable manner, managed with a high level of local participation.*

The second statement read: *“An organization that fosters greater community responsibility with local businesses, adult mentors and children in north Minneapolis.”* The third, which eventually was discarded, said: *“To create a system of Mentoring Youth with the goal to enhance a sense of community involvement with the long term goals of providing local fair employment, education and a sense of political awareness.”* The

fourth read: *“To create a mentoring program to help align responsible adults with children before they become irresponsible in order to foster a sense of community.”*

The group started with the first statement. Monte felt that if the words listing what a community standard of living would provide (food, shelter etc...) were named something else then it would be great. Brennan said that though it was a good summary of the views of the group it was not a mission statement that reflected what he thought we should be doing. Rick asked how a program could be developed to address all those issues. He called the statement a “long term goal and a hope for the project” but that it would take three generations to accomplish any of it. Richard said, “It’s just become so daunting all of a sudden. I’m almost overwhelmed just thinking about it. What we’re trying to create is a better society and world in a way. Its way more than what I thought it would be.”

I suggested that the reason it was so big was because they saw so much need. The group had seen that a mentoring program couldn’t stand alone. It needed to be connected to the community. One way of connecting it was through the local businesses. The suggestion was to help reestablish local businesses in the role of community support. Then the group developed an idea for a reciprocal relationship, where the businesses support the project, and the participants in turn support the businesses. One way to support the businesses was to advocate for government investment and the wise use of resources. The group felt that employment and living wage jobs act as a glue to hold communities together, and so this concept was woven into the project / business relationship.

Richard pointed to the devastation that had occurred in north Minneapolis with the departure of once thriving industries. He said the project was almost calling to bring

in businesses. He mentioned the failure of the enterprise zone concept which was marketed as a way of bringing small businesses into communities that had been shattered when large industries left. His recollection was that it had only accelerated the trend of replacing living wage jobs with minimum wage jobs, all the while using tax dollars for implementation. After discussing the above connections further, the focus moved back to a mentoring program. Richard felt that a mentoring program was very workable, and that the first goal statement could be as Rick put it “the group’s ideology”.

The group began to wordsmith one of the parts of the mission statement and eventually arrived at “To create a mentoring program to help align responsible adults with children to help the children become responsible members of the community.” They seemed happy with these results.

The next step on the agenda after adopting a mission statement was to begin to articulate strategic goals that would address the question “How will we do it?” As facilitator, my goal here was to get as many ideas out without getting mired at the detail level. Recruitment was the first aspect mentioned. Monte suggested that there be a good mix of people from within the community and from outside. Working from within the community could build the self-sufficiency of the project, while people from the outside could bring in different perspectives.

Richard felt strongly that working with disenfranchised people from within the community could be a very difficult prospect:

That’s so difficult, because all these people are so disenfranchised... What would you have? A big meeting and talk to everyone in sight? You’d almost have to because I know a lot of disenfranchised people... it’s almost a state of consciousness, it can be turned around and it has to be.

Monte agreed that when a person has a lot of issues in their lives, it is difficult to take their focuses away from living day to day. In discussing how to recruit people from the outside he said:

It's a charitable thing. You could sell them on that. You could sell them on the fact that the children you help out today are going to hit you in the head and take your wallet or purse tomorrow. We're community building and I think you can sell them on that.

He went on to say that in getting the mentors and the kids together, doing activities and going to events, "and then there's this cultural, intellectual, and social exchanger going on."

Rick suggested partnering business associations like the Lions Club from within North Minneapolis, and from some surrounding suburb. The group felt that this could be a part of the mixture of adults. Pulling these ideas together several people made suggestions that focused on activities that the project would want to promote, insuring that they were skill building with the kids. These skills could range from so called soft skills such as cooperation, organizing and planning, and caring to "so called" hard skills such as basic building and home maintenance or some basic carpentry.

Rick asked how the group should recruit the kids. Monte suggested advertising in schools, and hanging flyers. Rick wanted to be sure that community centers were included so that kids who weren't well connected with schools could be encouraged to participate. Realizing after a bit of brainstorming, that a program like this couldn't consume too many days in a week, the idea was to perhaps have a project one weekend, and a field trip following in the next week or two. Monte suggested being involved in tutoring students during the week as well.

Demetrius recollected a program that was tried in Michigan some years back where kids did some community work, went to school, and participated in some form of organized play, field trips, sporting events, or through a local community center:

It was called 'Earn while you play' ... You had a counselor on the corner, each block had a block coordinator that was an adult who was responsible for all the kids on his block within that area. The city pitched in a little bit, businesses pitched in a little bit, and the school district pitched in a little bit... Just like you said, you clean a bit, sweep up a lot, then you go to school a while. And kids don't like going to school from this corner. And then they get to play, go on a field trip...

Demetrius felt that having a coordinator on the corner, an adult within a very local area to counsel and to promote the program was a good idea. The group agreed that as Rick put it "it would be a good way to get inside community people active."

The group talked a bit about the use of community centers or schools as a base of operations. It seemed unrealistic to raise operating funds to actually rent space. The idea would be to use community spaces that would be free to the program.

After a short break, the group continued with the second agenda item, "How will we do it?" Richard spoke up about needing a very comprehensive recruitment program:

That's one spot for people outside of the community. I think that everyone needs to be asked; I don't care if it's the wino on the street corner. Everybody has to be asked; because my feelings are that if you ask people they will help you. They'll sacrifice to help. They'll want to help.

Richard felt that this might be a bit unrealistic, but should be the intent of the project. He felt that people shouldn't be excluded from the project because "they weren't a friend of somebody. Or because they didn't fit some type of profile, short of someone who might be dangerous."

Monte wondered about how big an area the project should focus on. There was considerable dialogue around the scope of the project at this point. Monte felt that the

project should start small with ten or twelve blocks and then grow. Rick felt they should have a much larger area not limited to certain blocks, but with a center of operations. Demetrius estimated that north Minneapolis was about 40 blocks north to south, and 20 blocks east to west, totaling 800 square blocks.

As the revelation of 800 blocks set in, it seemed somewhat overwhelming to several people. I suggested that it might be possible to bridge the two ideas by making north Minneapolis the project area, but then picking some number of community centers that would be the beginning points for the project. Some recruitment could be done across the entire neighborhood, while house-to-house flyer dropping and block coordinator recruitment could be limited to a manageable area around each of the community centers.

The group was in agreement with this plan, so the dialogue shifted to funding. There were suggestions to go obtain grants, lobby legislators for state and local funding, and corporate and local business sponsors. Rick suggested that the local businesses could proffer up tools, food, perhaps discounts. Operating funds could be obtained through local development corporations, or specific federal grants. Different fund raising projects were discussed including selling hotdogs donated by a local chain of grocery stores, and taking bread orders for a local bakery that sponsors schools and neighborhood groups. A hierarchy was developed, starting with what Rick called "Seed money" from federal grants, followed by donations and grants from large corporations, followed by local businesses.

The group touched on transportation issues, moving materials and kids to different places. There were many unresolved issues but they seemed to be at the next



level of detail. Moving on, the group felt that it would be something to keep at the top of the list for early implementation planning.

The group moved the dialogue to the third agenda item, project evaluation. Evaluation could focus on how many participants stay in the program over a period of years. Another suggestion was to look at community characteristics and see if the project might have impacted any in positive ways. Another suggestion was to track any increases in the number of local businesses participating in the program. Monte suggested trying to evaluate success in the kids somehow. Rick pointed out that it would be difficult to identify what would qualify as success “A kid who grows up and works in a factory is not by some people’s standards a successful kid.” There was a suggestion to compare the High School drop out rates of kids who participated in the program with the school district averages.

The group seemed pleased with the evaluation ideas, and I steered them toward the last agenda item, which was reflecting on the process of group work and thoughts on the project that was constructed. Brennan said that it was much more involved than he thought it would be. He liked the depth of the interactions and the exchange of ideas.

Rick said that he thought the project was very realistic “it seemed realistic, as if you really had posted a flyer for community activists to try to get something like this off the ground.”

Monte said “I think it was interesting because everyone brought something unique to the table. It was sort of a deepening for everyone. We all got to raise different issues from different points of view. A lot of it was very educational... I liked being a part of it. This is what we as community members are missing. This has already given me a whole new insight and new way of looking at my role in the community, just by being here. He

went on to say “I love the process... I think, as long as you don’t walk in thinking you know everything, you’re going to get a really good exchange, and get some new ideas and a different way of looking at things.” He felt that his head was turned around about the way the media in this country creates images of people, for instance those in north Minneapolis. He had the perception that they didn’t vote, and many people were probably pretty lazy.

Richard said about working on this project “It has given me a lot respect for existing organizations like the Lions Club. What it really takes to make something work.” Both Monte and Richard agreed that the more people who became involved in the planning the better for the project. While it is more difficult and time consuming, the product is much stronger.

I brought up my impressions of the third session, both at the time, and after listening to the recordings. The session was difficult and frustrating, but as the group struggled with many issues around not imposing this project on a community, it seemed as though both the group and the project came out stronger. Despite the tension, there was civility, and a respect for ideas that carried through to the end of the project. The need to connect to the community, which had been discussed in a cursory way early in the process, became much more essential to the project during the third session.

I also mentioned that it was amazing that of all the possibilities for a project, they had chosen to work with the next generation. This group felt that the people who were losing the most in this loss of the middle class were kids. Richard pointed out “That’s basically a Union mentality, to make it better for the next generation. Maybe it’s a human trait.”

I introduced the idea of using this kind of project in the context of labor outreach / labor education. Richard said that there was precedent for strong union locals to have that kind of connection to the community. He recalled reading about a Teamsters local in Cincinnati or Cleveland during the 60's before trucking was deregulated. There were Block Captains and community projects organized by union members.