PREFACE

Note to Chris:

Originally my preface to the manual focused only on the underlying philosophy behind the methodology used in the creation of these exercises. Since the importance of and need for such an alternative pedagogy cannot be understood without some understanding of the problem, I did make reference however to various aspects of the problem (in other words, it was not terribly well structured and rambled quite a bit).

Upon realizing (at Michael's) that I neglected to do the final report, and reviewing the final report sheet, I realized that I had left unanswered some pretty important questions [like a clear, well-organized statement of the problem, my specific goals, specific results (other than simply the creation of the manual) and some concluding remarks]. However, once I went back however to address these, it was obvious that there was a great deal of overlap with my preface. I also realized that the type of information requested in the final report should be included not as an addendum to the manual just for this assignment, but should actually be a part of the manual, so that people understand the reasoning and rationale behind it. So, to make a long story short, what ended up hanging me up in the end (after all the other hang-ups) was merging the two, which I have done I believe (and hope) rather successfully, but certainly hope to polish up before I begin to actually make this manual available to people for use in the field. (Any editing comments are therefore quite welcome--both for this preface and the entire thing, that it).

Well, after all this, I hope you enjoy this (and have the time to wade through all of it). Please try to use your imagine as you are reading the exercises.

PROJECT

for M.S. program in Community Economic Development

"Towards a Liberating Strategy of Education/Development:
A Training Manual for New Members of Community Land Trusts"

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PREFACE

I. "Why is there a need for this manual?"

Community economic development is a subset of community development, which is merely a subset of human development. I often have to remind myself of this and check in with others about it because somewhere and somehow in the midst of our development work, it appears that this simple concept often gets lost. We get the thirty units of affordable housing built, or we get the financing for the cooperative laundromat, but have we really developed the people involved? Are the intended beneficiaries in any better position to help themselves than they were at the start of the whole project?

Being relatively new to the field of community economic development, I feel it is premature for me to form a definitive answer to this question. It has been an ongoing concern for me however, and from my earlier days as a community organizer. Whether as an organizer or a development practitioner, it has been terribly frustrating to feel often that I am merely perpetuating the cycle of feeding people, instead of teaching them to fish for themselves, thereby continuing to breed the very deeply ingrained dependency patterns which have developed in many low-income and--to use a term I feel is most accurate--"oppressed" communities.

A clear manifestation of the problem is that while our more progressive community development strategies give great attention to community control and design new structures accordingly, empowerment and self-determination for the indigenous peoples of those communities is often quite lacking, with people from the outside often running the show. There are many reasons for this, and there is no reason casting blame or

being unappreciative of the efforts these 'outsiders' are making; the relevant question is simply, "What are these people doing to ensure that local people are being trained so that they—the outsiders—will be replaced as soon as possible?" And here's where I find the rub.

My particular field is affordable housing and, as a technical assistance provider for developing community land trusts (CLTs), I work as a consultant in assisting community members to start from scratch to build viable non-government, community based non-profit organizations that will promote and develop perpetual—"limited equity"—affordable housing, in addition to acquiring and holding land for the benefit of the community. So far, education and training around organizational development has taken up most of my time in the field. Identifying good resources and training techniques is therefore key. In looking around however for models, talking with other housing activists and attending conferences, it appears that very little good material exists.

Of the little material that does exist, virtually none of it is geared to really pulling in and training folks from the very early stages. Much of it seems to presume a certain level of commitment and knowledge on the part of the members and "prospective leaseholders" (since this is whom we are dealing with in CLTs and similar non-profit, community-based housing initiatives). In most of these cases, the members or trainees have some level of guarantee that they will actually have a unit in the developing building. What is therefore left unaddressed is how to build the organization to this point: how to get members actively involved, committed and trained so that the organization can be moved to the stage where they have developed a building. Since a CLT is a private, primarily volunteer community-based organization, it relies for the most part on local volunteers to lay this groundwork: doing the initial outreach and

promoting interest; holding the meetings and arranging for speakers or resource people; educating folks on the CLT principles and structure; establishing the committees and making sure that they are running well; getting the board elected and trained; etc. These are tasks which require some level of training. The question therefore is: before you even have anything tangible to promise people, how do you capture their interest and train them in order to get the organization to the point where it can guarantee its members a housing unit within a certain period of time?

In addition to these issue of the content of the training materials, is the issue of style, or methodology: how are the trainings designed? One of the critical components which seems to be lacking is adequate and appropriate methodologies which will promote and encourage this process of human development. While the designs of the community economic development movement (as we know it) and the CLT are quite radical in their concepts and are about changing the day-to-day lives of people, often the methodology employed (the pedagogy, vocabulary, etc.) strikes me as more representative of the conventional, mainstream approach, and is therefore quite alienating and inaccessible to many people. Many conferences I have attended have been perfect examples of this. Even when the organizers are very sensitive in certain ways to the needs of oppressed peoples (eg: providing child-care, evening sessions for working people, etc.), they still can not break away from the old-line approach in their pedagogy (eg: lectures, perhaps small groups but not structured in a very participatory manner). The more thought I gave this issue, the more I realized the extreme difficulty of achieving what I desired: imparting information, training and skills, while at the same time retaining a highly interesting, upbeat, active and participatory atmosphere.

What is the root cause of this problem? I can only speculate. Even within community economic development circles I believe there has been a general acceptance of the prevailing, traditional Western, hierarchical methodology of teaching and learning. And, there has not been enough of an effort made to shirk an old skin that has been thrust upon us and to take the time and energy to develop a new one, one more attuned to our needs; therefore when dealing with those we seek to train, we simply replicate the familiar old patterns

The problem is then exacerbated I believe by the issue of cultural difference. I came to notice that most of the training materials I was reviewing made no mention of the role that cultural difference plays in the design and implementation of training and pedagogy. Subsequently, they assumed the existence and adequacy of the dominant norm and designed their exercises accordingly. For the most part, the names of fictional characters, the settings described, the jokes and stories told and the particular modes of communication created, all assumed an Anglo-American norm.

While this may be a highly controversial topic for some, it is obvious to me that all people learn best from styles and 'norms' with which they are familiar. Therefore, when designing educational materials, a particular sensitivity must be present towards issues of gender, race, class, level of education, sexual orientation, religion, and such other issues. For example, instructors often distribute exercises and ask participants to read the instructions quietly to themselves. This assumes that everyone can read, an assumption that shouldn't be made when working with oppressed communities. It is however also insensitive to, in attempting to be sensitive, ask the group, "Can anyone here not read?"

since this obviously places people in an embarrassing position. In the same way, asking for a publicly displayed collection of the dues places people who don't have and may need to ask for a waiver in a highly visible, possibly embarrassing situation.

More complicated issues arise around culture. It is my belief that the differing world-views and modes of communication of different cultures lead them to learn differently. This is not meant to imply that people cannot adapt or are incapable of learning in a style that is foreign to them. It is meant to say however that the best and easiest learning for them will probably be that which is presented in a manner which they are familiar with. African-American and Puerto Rican cultures, for eg., are very much oral cultures, much more than Anglo-American culture or Chinese-American culture. Therefore, if you are designing training exercises for the former group, you would probably achieve a greater level of participation if you relied more upon oral input than written.

To return to the basic issue however, let me summarize by saying that the problem is two-fold: 1) the absence of materials which will train members of oppressed communities in the basics of organizing and introduce them to the concepts of community economic development; and 2) the failure to design materials which offer an alternative approach in their methodologies, and therefore fall short of moving towards ultimate liberation and self-determination.

The end result of all these problems may be that community economic development practitioners can find more successes in actual projects produced than in people developed and movements created. If this is so, we have come a long way, but we are still far from achieving what is truly meant by self-determination.

II. "What were my goals in doing this project?"

It became clear to me that I needed to help forge some tools to help lay a foundation to assist in the process of grass-roots, community-based oppressed peoples being assured a place in the determination of their destinies. The most helpful and tangible manifestation of this that I could think of was a manual consisting of training exercises, developed in such a manner and with an underlying methodology that sought to achieve not only the imparting of information, but the forging of the tools for liberation.

Since my work is in housing, and particularly with CLTs, I decided to gear the manual particularly towards prospective CLT leaseholders, with a focus primarily on the initial stages of organizational development. My goal was to work the information into a form that could become a tool that low-income folks could use themselves, towards the goal of self-sufficiency and empowerment. An underlying premise of this manual is that a liberatory strategy of education must employ creative, innovative and participatory methods in crafting its alternative pedagogy.

I have acted from the premise that culture too is an important factor in molding a methodology aimed at achieving liberation. I have designed this manual to speak to one of the many groups of people who are regularly excluded from the 'standard' texts; more particularly it is geared towards that community to which I have the greatest commitment and where I do the most work: the African-American community. I believe the reader will however share my feeling that for the most part the exercises are quite universal; it is in rather subtle, sensitive ways that I believe I have crafted the overall design so as to make it more accessible to and speak more closely in the language of African-Americans.

Since I believe that little in theory is worthwhile until it is tested n practice, my intention was to actually conduct a few of these exercises, evaluate them with the participants and then revise them accordingly. The second part of this test as to the value of this manual was to have at least a few of the exercises in good enough shape that I would feel comfortable giving them out to others to try with their organizations, so that I could then get their feedback in order to determine what really worked for them, and what needed to be revamped. This would also answer whether or not I had fulfilled one of my great hopes for this manual: that it be simple and practical enough that any organizer can pick it up and, with a minimum of advanced preparation, conduct the exercises.

III. "What steps did I take to develop this manual?"

How does one create a manual which does all this? I realized early on that to achieve these lofty goals, a series of smaller goals was warranted. I first needed to identify what resources already existed in this area and explore the various strategies employed by community-based organizations which are successful in doing community outreach and building grass-roots leadership in their organizations. I also needed to identify and familiarize myself with alternative pedagogical methods for educating, training and empowering, (without getting too caught up in the material, given that this is the stuff that doctoral dissertations are made of, as Michael Swack knows.)

Once achieving these initial tasks, I then intended to begin to develop the exercises for this manual, which would incorporate these various ideologies, while also drawing upon my own experience and wisdom.

The vast majority of my research and development time was spent on the actual design and writing of the exercises. I did however write a letter to various community organizations and I ended up interviewing two of them: the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Boston, Massachusetts and ACORN in Brooklyn, New York.

Both DSNI and ACORN have long track-records of doing community organizing in their communities, which consist predominantly of People of Color; both organizations have also moved from being simply community organizers, involved in 'protest politics', to being community development practitioners, namely in the area of housing. Regarding the issue of education/training methodology and individual empowerment, very similar themes were expressed by people in both groups. First there was the immediate recognition and appreciation of this issue as a major concern and major stumbling block. Second, there was the sense of frustration at not having good leadership and direction around this issue, either in the form of people who are trained in this field or written resources which address these particular concerns.

The ACORN interviewees made much reference to the texts by and principles of Saul Alinsky, someone whose approach the organization deeply respects and follows; however, these same people freely admitted that Alinsky's writings often fail to move from the theoretical to the practical, leaving his followers in the lurch around questions of implementation.

One of the individuals at DSNI, named Jerry, spoke very highly of the "Monster Manual" created by T-4-T ("Training for Trainers"), which is used exclusively as part of their own training seminars (thereby making it virtually impossible for me to review in-depth). Jerry praised T-4-T's approach, especially its incorporation of what is called the "Small Group

Activity Method" (SGAM--originated in Europe) and the "Human Relations Method" (originated here in the U.S.). However, he felt very strongly that the T-4-T exercises were geared towards "professional" organizers and not so much the disempowered victims themselves. In his opinion, they also lacked any type of special sensitivity to different pedagogical methods around issues of culture.

The two written sources I did locate and find valuable on these issues, including the issue of culture, were Paulo Freire (whose work I was already familiar with) and a three volume series of books out of Africa called "Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers". Freire, whose radical theories on education are quite well-known particularly through his work "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", is referred to and quoted quite extensively in the African texts. These texts are quite unique and powerful in that they incorporate wisdom from many different methodologies, political view-points and, most notably, cultures. The writers constantly remind the readers of the need to find wisdom and the answers to people's problems within the people themselves, and their own indigenous cultures.

The first few exercises of this manual are for the purpose of having the participants choose what pedagogical methods they feel are appropriate for them. I have thus presented, in encapsulated form, an amalgam of the key themes and approaches of the Small Group Activity and Human Relations Method, and of Freire and the African texts. And the exercises have been constructed in a manner which, hopefully, incorporates and gives life to these theories.

IV. "What were the results of my work?"

The major result of my work lies before you, in many pages. I will simply say by way of explanation that while it is geared particularly towards members and prospective leaseholders in a CLT, the fact that it focuses primarily on the early stages of organization development means that there is actually very little that speaks peculiarly to CLTs, or even housing work for that matter. While the shortcoming of the manual for a CLT is that it only takes the CLT so far (after which a sequel is needed), the advantage of this is that the manual is quite universal to community development and organizing work. The section on the board for example, focuses primarily on what the general role and responsibilities of a board are, and not what is particularly unique to the board of a CLT.

While it was an intended goal to actually conduct a few of these exercises, this was only achieved with four of the exercises. The evaluation by the participants following each of these sessions was, for the most part, quite positive. After the second workshop, one woman exclaimed, "I like this; this is fun," which was quite heartening. An older man stated that if school had been like this, he would have stayed on and gotten his degree. There was also a marked difference in many people's comfort level with the concepts, following the sessions. Of course, there were slow spots: things which worked out nicely and neatly in my head and on paper, but just did not go over in practice. Those exercises I have since revised but not re-tried, so I can only hope that they will be more successful on the next time round.

The last real test of the success of this manual has yet to be conducted, though I had hoped for it as a goal. Only now upon "completing" this manual do I finally feel that it is polished enough that it can be distributed and tried by others.

V. "What concluding comments would I make about this project?"

It has been no simple task to craft educational and skills-development sessions which achieve all the necessary components: impart information, provide motivation and inspiration, instill a renewed sense of self-confidence and faith, overcome apathy and cynicism, teach the necessary skills, and empower people to take hold of their futures and shape their own destinies. And the product that follows is far from perfect.

Overall however I feel quite good about this manual and I feel that my project has been a success. I have created what I believe is a very practical, tangible, well-needed piece of work that can simply be handed to anyone to use (upon their own review and manipulation of it to their needs). My greatest regret is that it was too academic; because it took me most of the time to simply review the literature and the alternative methodologies, and to develop the exercises, the manual was not adequately tested, in my opinion. Nor has it been the result of the type of collective efforts that I like to involve myself in. I intend this to change however as it is utilized and feedback is given back to me.

The most important recommendations I can make to the organizer and/or development practitioner who intends to use what lies within is:

* Like revolution, you cannot simply use a standard blueprint; any plan for development or social change must be tailored to the particular needs and circumstances of that particular setting. View this manual as a tool which lays much of the groundwork and helps to get you to think creatively; but please do not see it as a substitute for your own creative thought, time and energy.

* Never stop evaluating: improvements can and should always be made; new, more innovative ways can always be found. In this sense, this manual should never be viewed as a "finished product."

* Don't fight against reality; flow with it. Some of the enclosed ideas, or some that you may come up with yourself, may strike you as brilliant; they may also fall flat on their face when you try them. While your wisdom and judgment counts, revise and develop these exercises and principles according to what actually works, and according to the wisdom and experience of the participants themselves.