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Small Voices Against the Wind: Local Knowledge and Social Transformation

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In all settings, people have interpretive frameworks and knowledge borne out of engaging in everyday activities. This local knowledge is tacit and contains the prior assumptions and recipes for life in the local setting. In times of rapid social change, this local knowledge is under threat, especially when change agents introduce systems of knowledge exogenous to the local milieu. This clash beween the old and the new, at a cognitive level, can be a constructive force for change but it also has the potential to destroy self-esteem and the capacity to understand and manage change.

Drawing on examples arising out of work in rural communities in South Africa, the dynamics of the conflict between local and exogenous knowledge during a period of social transformation are examined. Dislocations occur when people become obliged to engage in new activities whose origins lie outside the local context. Whether or not the dislocations constitute productive or destructive moments for constructing new ways of thinking largely depends on the nature of the activity; the interpersonal dynamics of the actors involved; and the "raising to consciousness" of the rules, recipes, and cognitive tools required for active participation.

A model of such dynamics is presented and used to identify ways in which attention to the interface between local and exogenous knowledge may help to ensure greater equity, social justice, and sustainable social transformation.

Domination, and the conflict that arises from it, comes in many guises. Among the more obvious forms are physical violence, intimidation, territorial occupation, and legislative and political oppression. However, less obvious but possibly equally damaging forms operate at more psychological levels. Amongst these is the conflict that arises when different systems of thought meet and are contested but on an unequal basis. The subordination or destruction of one form of knowledge over

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another can have far-reaching consequences for the mental health of individuals involved in such a struggle. The loss of familiar metaphors, models, and tools for thinking not only limits a person's capacity to make sense of his or her world but also undermines self-confidence and self-esteem.

Within the African context, domination at this level has received some attention. In South Africa, for example, under the apartheid regime, Biko (1978), amongst others, argued that apartheid had its most fundamental impact not on the political or economic level but at the psychological level through the destruction of Black identity and life-worlds. In the Black Consciousness Movement, attention was given to reaffirming Africaness to overcome the impact that apartheid had on how people conceptualise themselves and their experience. In Algeria, Fanon (1963) presented a comparable argument in the context of the Algerian struggle for independence against France. Bulhan (1985) adopted these ideas to examine the African American experience in the United States. African novels also provide a rich psychological insight into the depth of the subordination of ways of thinking about self and society arising from colonialism (e.g., Achebe, 1958) and offer fruitful metaphors for understanding the psychology of social change (Gilbert, 1989).

The issue, however, has wider contemporary relevance to the issues of peace and conflict in South Africa and other nations undergoing rapid change. Although there is hope that issues of colonialism and racism as ideologies of the State can be eradicated, the processes of transformation nevertheless contain many moments at which domination of one system of thought over another can occur. The creation of a new society does not simply come about by electing a democratic government or instituting a new constitution and Bill of Rights. Changes at the legislative level have to be mirrored in changes at the level of everyday action. To this end, in South Africa, the State through its government departments and commissions, political parties, nongovernment organisations (NGOs), and community-based organisations is engaging in a wide range of initiatives to effect change at local community levels. Such programmes invariably require people to change the way they think and act about aspects of their everyday lives. The intention of such action is to create a more equitable and productive society. However, the interactions between "agents for change" and groups and individuals in the "targeted" communities are the meeting points for potentially different systems of knowledge and everyday practice. In this meeting exists the seed for constructive growth or destructive conflict.

The Reconstruction and Development Programme, which is the South African Government's plan to address the historical inequalities created by past racial policies, is a case in point. Notwithstanding its popular support and its moral justification, it is explicitly a programme of social engineering and transformation. It, therefore, carries with it models of the nature of societal needs, visions of utopia, and rules and recipes for change. The fact that there is a need for such a programme suggests that such visions or ways of understanding are not present or functioning adequately in the "focal" communities that the Programme aims to serve. The

nature of the way these divergent ways of thinking articulate in the activities of the Programme will determine whether new empowered identities or conflict and alienation will emerge.

Similar conditions operate in programmes of transformation and development to be found elsewhere in the Third World. Interventions linked to such issues as family planning, primary health, nutrition, agricultural production, water, and sanitation are designed to change social practices and the way people think about everyday needs. In such instances, the knowledge and social practices operating in the villages, informal settlements, and communities under scrutiny are seen as insufficient or inappropriate, and strategies are implemented to introduce a new order. The force for change involves the introduction of new technologies and activities that are not necessarily part of the conventional practices in the local context. This inevitably presents a challenge to existing knowledge and ways of thinking. Agents of change, whether they are local "carriers of modernity" (Berger, Berger, & Kelner, 1974), representatives of the State, or NGOs, enter the local situation with new ways of thinking to challenge the local consensus. This meeting of cognitive frameworks can be a constructive force for change, but it also has the potential to destroy self-esteem and the means for understanding local action.

It is the potential conflict and the threats to peace that arise from the interaction between change agents and members of local communities, during times of transformation, which is the focus of this article. It is argued that an understanding of the psychological dynamics, in the joint activity that occurs between the parties involved in programmes of change, is essential if the threats of conflict and domination are to be overcome and the opportunity for constructive transformation is to be maximized. A theoretical framework for understanding these dynamics as a meeting of systems of knowledge is presented, drawing on contemporary ideas from cognitive and cultural psychology. This model is then used to identify ways in which the potential clash between local and "exogenous" knowledge can be used constructively to ensure greater equity and social justice and generate ideas to enhance empowerment rather than domination.

The ideas in this article are built on active involvement in rural and community development work in historically deprived communities in South Africa, over the period up to and during the recent political changes. To provide the reader with insights into the dynamics of the processes operating in such programmes, two vignettes are presented. These capture some of the elements of the clash of the meeting of systems of knowledge and the power relations operating in such interactions. Against this backdrop, the theoretical framework and its application are developed.

VOICES IN THE WIND

Vignettes 1 and 2 provide two instances of local voices in the winds of change. These small but important voices articulate the wisdom that comes from engaging

in the mundane activities of life. The vignettes speak to how people interpret events and their lives from frameworks that have been constructed as part of everyday life in their specific social contexts. But they also reveal the limitations of such knowledge in relation to other agendas for change, especially when such agendas are established from outside the local situation. These vignettes are not exceptional, and if one wishes to listen, similar voices can be heard in most interactions where agents for change—teachers, extension officers, community developers, political activists, health workers—enter the lives of people with the explicit or tacit objective of changing existing practices.

Vignette 1

This vignette comes from field work conducted with colleagues G. Nkwinti and H. van Vlaenderen in 1991–1992 on commercial "White" farms in the Eastern Cape Province. The term *White farms* is used to denote farms in areas where, under apartheid laws, only people classified as White could obtain title deeds to the land. On these farms reside Black families whose members are employed as workers. At the time of the study, they had no rights to tenure. They lived and worked under conditions set by the farmer. Such families are among the most marginalised people in South Africa, not only because of their geographic isolation but also because of the webs of dependency that operate in relation to the farm owners. Schooling for the children of farm workers, where it exists, comes in the form of farm schools—schools built and managed by the farmer on whose property the school is based. Teachers at such schools often come from outside the local community.

The research was directed at understanding the dilemmas of raising children in such circumstances. The question was: "How do parents equip their children for life when their futures are insecure and when they have limited resources upon which to draw?"

One of the strongest findings was that many parents brought up their children to enable them to escape from the farms. In the process, some parents denied their children access to much of their local knowledge.

In one respect, however, they used their local knowledge as an important framework in their socialisation strategies. Many parents talked about instilling in their children a moral code—*Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is a complex concept that includes a composite of community oriented values. It is the thread that runs through the following kinds of phrases. "I want my child to regard everyone with respect." "Children must always include the word *tata* (Father), *mama* (Mother), *bhuti* (brother) or *sisi* (sister) when talking to parents and elder brothers and sisters." Inherent in this concept are such attributes as humility (*ubulali*), care and love for others, good neighbourliness, and the attributes that underlie communality. To lack

ubuntu is sufficient reason to be ostracised by the whole community. Parents felt that if the children internalised *ubuntu,* this would see them through regardless of the situation in which they found themselves.

Ubuntu is essentially conservative, in that it preserves some form of control and influence in the face of rapid change. However, in such a context, it was seen as adaptive because it focused on the other person's humanity and served to prevent the disintegration of the social fabric of rural (or urban) life. This aspect of local knowledge was, therefore, a rich resource guiding everyday socialisation strategies.

However, such knowledge was under threat as it became reconstructed in the time of change. Whereas there is a huge gulf between humility and passive submissiveness, there is the danger that the distinction can be lost in the process of socialisation. This is particularly true when, in a changing society, a range of other sites for the socialisation of children exist.

Evidence of the corruption of *ubuntu* appeared in some of the case studies we conducted in farm schools in the area (Gilbert, Nkwinti, & Van Vlaenderen, 1990). In many of these schools, teachers taught up to 60 children spread across six grades with all the children in one classroom. In such situations, the questioning, active child can be seen as disruptive and some teachers actively discouraged such behaviour by invoking the idea of *ubuntu.* Inquisitive behaviour was seen as being disrespectful and violating the tenets of humility. In such situations, the socialisation "press" was to encourage passive behaviour and conflate *ubuntu* with submissiveness.

This raises a number of questions about the internalisation of the values of *ubuntu.* First, if respect and submissiveness are conflated, what is the effect on the intellectual development of the child? Does this limit the development of self-regulation skills? Coupled with the parents' emphasis on socialising their children to have the "right" demeanour for school—obedience and respect—rather than cognitive perspicacity, what effect does this have on the development of a critical consciousness?

Second, how does *ubuntu* relate to life outside the rural milieu? The assertive individualism of western society appears to embody markedly opposite values to those of *ubuntu.* How does the rural person respond to the demands of environments and relationships where such opposing ethics exist? Is the response an acquiescence to passivity, a rejection of the values of *ubuntu,* and/or a compartmentalisation of life worlds to preserve personal integrity?

Vignette 2

While working on a rural development project in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa in the late 1980s, an agricultural extension worker shared the following story with me.

A couple of years prior to our discussion, this extension official had been meeting with local subsistence farmers to encourage them to use hybrid maize seed and appropriate planting methods to increase local maize production. After a series of meetings, he agreed with the farmers to demonstrate the new technology. He planted the new seed on a plot of land, using the methods developed at the agricultural experimental station, and got the farmers to plant alongside his plot an equivalent area using local seed and technology. At the end of the season, both plots were harvested and the extension officer was able to show that many more bags of maize were reaped from his plot.

On the basis of this experiment, farmers showed an interest in his seed. The next season, he made it available to them and taught them how to plant it.

After the 1st year, production was up, but in the second and subsequent seasons the extension officer noticed that significant numbers of farmers had returned to using their old seed. He did a survey among the farmers, and they agreed that the hybrid seed did improve production. He couldn't understand why some had stopped using it. It took a lot of digging around before he uncovered what was happening. One day, while sitting and talking to a farmer, he was told the following:

We are not rich in our family. Our money comes from the little that gets sent to us by the family members who are away, working in the cities. We do not have enough money to farm in a big way, and so we just try to grow enough food to have something to put on our table every day. This new seed you brought us was good. It gave us more and bigger mealies (corn), but the problem was it did not keep well. The new maize has a much softer kernel than our traditional maize. The rats and weevils, therefore, attacked the cobs we stored for winter and in the end, we had less food than we did in the past. Also, did you know that you cannot use this new maize as seed for the next season? With the new maize, you have to go and buy new seed for planting each year. With our traditional maize, I can put a few of the biggest and best cobs in the roof, where the smoke keeps the pests away, and then I don't have to buy any seed when it comes to planting time.

How can one make sense of the meeting of the different cognitive frameworks depicted in these two vignettes? In the next two sections, some ideas emerging from the fields of cognitive and cultural psychology are examined and used to make a distinction between local and exogenous knowledge. Built on these ideas, a model of the dynamics of the meeting of minds is proposed.

SITUATED COGNITION AND ACTIVITY

Recent developments in cognitive and cultural psychology provide a useful framework for understanding cognition and social transformation. Taking their cue from Vygotsky (1976), a number of cognitive theorists argue that cognition is not something that goes on "in the mind," but that it is socially situated (Cole, 1988; Rogoff, 1990). Such a view is more than the "cognition plus context"

approach to understanding the links between thought and society. As Resnick (1991) asserted, "the social context in which cognitive activity takes place is an integral part of that activity not just the surrounding context for it" (p. 4). Vygotsky (1976) argued that the origins of thought and cognitive structures lie in sociocultural activity. We come to know by engaging in social practices that provide frameworks for what are appropriate goals for thinking, opportunities to practice ways of thinking, and tools or the means for thought. Participating with others in activity is also an important element of the formation of mind. In any social practice, others mediate experience for the less experienced individual and provide the means for the learner to go beyond his or her present capacity and practice new ways of thinking prior to using such ways of thinking for self-mastery—the essence of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

Cultural psychology comes to a similar understanding of the situatedness of cognition. Shweder (1990) asserted that psyche and culture are seamlessly interconnected. He argued that culture is the "human artifactual world populated with products of our own design" (p. 2) and that this world is an intentional one in which the things that go to make up our culture (the rules and recipes for life) do not "exist independent of our involvements with them and reactions to them and they exercise their influence in our lives because of our conceptions of them" (p. 2).

This intersection between cognitive and cultural psychology provides useful ideas for understanding the cognitive aspects of social transformation.

The situatedness of cognition raises questions about possible differences in the way people think as a result of experiencing different contexts for thinking. Lave (1993) used the term *a community of practice* to capture this idea. Activities operate within a community of practice that supports, structures, controls, and provides "affordances" for individual thinking and learning. As communities of practice differ, so will their activities and the knowledge generated by them.

Constructivist views of cognition highlight the centrality of activity in cognition. Vygotsky (1976) and, more recently, Wertsch (1981) argued that activity should be the unit of analysis for understanding human cognition, for it is here that one captures the process of the social formation of mind (drawing on the work of Leont'ev, 1981, and von Cranach, 1982). Any activity can be understood as system of tasks, goals, actions, and tools. Reflecting this against Vignette 2, this system can be understood as follows. The task constitutes the "problem space within which actions are constructed" (Gauvain, personal communication, April 29, 1994). In terms of the vignette, the farmer's task or problem space was to produce food. The goal of an activity concerns the motive that underlies the activity, which in the current example was to produce food to feed the family (and not to produce food to generate a cash income—which was the goal from which the extension officer was operating). Actions involve the sequence of acts that have to be followed to solve the task that, in the example, may include such things as tilling the soil,

selecting the seed, putting the seed at a specific depth in the soil, and so forth. The tools of an activity constitute the means that one has available for fulfilling the actions—a hoe in contrast to a tractor and plough or, on a more psychological level, the recipe or model that provides the structure for the action.

Placed within the idea of communities of practice, all these elements of activity will take particular forms tied to the human artifactual, intentional world (Shweder, 1990) in which the individual lives. The similarity of the knowledge generated across communities of practice will be determined by the extent to which these communities of practice engage in tasks that have the same goals, actions, and tools. It is this idea that lies behind the potential clash between local and exogenous knowledge.

Local Versus Exogenous Knowledge

The engagement of forms of knowledge in the process of social transformation can be characterised as the contact between local and exogenous knowledge. Local knowledge can be defined as the everyday knowledge of a community of practice—the integrative frameworks, or collection of ideas and assumptions—that are used in a community of practice to guide, control, and explain actions within the specific setting. In Vignette 1 it is the idea of *Ubuntu* used to guide parents' socialisation strategies, and in Vignette 2 it is the farmer's wisdom about traditional seed. Essentially, planned interventions involve the meeting of the local knowledge of the "focal" community of practice with the local knowledge of the community of practice of the change agent.

What are the general characteristics of local knowledge? Geertz (1983) argued that local knowledge can be understood as common sense operating as a cultural system. He makes the point that common sense is not just what everybody "in their right mind knows," but rather a body of considered thought—colloquial wisdom. It "is not what the mind cleared of cant apprehends: it is what the mind filled with presuppositions concludes" (p. 84).

Recent work on everyday cognition (Puckett & Reese, 1993) and socially situated cognition (Resnick, Levine, & Teasley, 1991) provides insights into the general structure of these presuppositions. First, local knowledge is not formally taught but derives from participation with others in the everyday activities of the community of practice. As a result, in the absence of the codification of such knowledge, local knowledge is tacit. In other words, it is practical and not overtly expressed or stated (Sternberg, Wagner, & Okagaki, 1993). Scribner's research (1986) into on-the-job problem solving of dairy workers is informative of such practical knowledge. She found that unlike formal problem solving, the definition of problems in practical thinking is not taken as given but defined and restructured in relation to the environment. In a similar way, Saxe (1991), in his study of everyday mathematical thinking among the Oksapmin in New Guinea and candy sellers in Brazil, found that goals for action did not exist outside the context of

activity but emerged from it. In other words, given the freedom to do so, people exploit the local social and physical environment to restructure problems and shift the problem space to use "affordances" in the environment to solve the task. "The operations used to solve problems reflect the peculiar capacities and constraints of objects that social convention classifies as tools or aids for mental work" (Scribner, 1986, p.24). In contrast to this, in formal thought, problems are often defined in some abstract form, independent of the context and often represented "in the head." Becoming a skilled practical thinker may move one in the direction of more concrete rather than abstract thinking.

Chapman (1993), in comparing everyday reasoning with formal reasoning, made an interesting observation. Whereas formal reasoning is based on formal logic and sets of rules disembedded from prosaic discourse, everyday reasoning derives from the social and communicative activity of argumentation. He argued, therefore, that the manner in which inferences are made in such forms of reasoning differ. In everyday reasoning, the inferential process draws on the speaker's assertions, reasons, and intentions rather than on deductive logic. Everyday reasoning is concerned more with the analysis of how or why something is said, rather than on the logic of what is said. This means that, when engaging with everyday local knowledge, appeals to logic miss the point. There is a structure to local knowledge but not a structure based on deductive inference.

Linking local knowledge to a community of practice has a further implication. Local knowledge is not equally distributed in a community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that everyday learning takes place through "legitimate peripheral participation." A person's facility with local knowledge depends on the centrality of his or her participation in the community of practice. The relative neophyte, whereas in comparison to outsiders may seem knowledgeable, will not be as informed as those who have practiced the activities more expansively or more frequently. There are, therefore, people who are experts in the local knowledge, even though this expertise may still be tacit knowledge.

It may be asked why the term *local knowledge* is used in preference to *traditional knowledge*? Placing knowledge in a community of practice means that as environmental circumstances or social relations change, so will the local knowledge. A community of practice is perpetuated through activity and is, therefore, dynamic. As actors change, as tasks are defined and place new demands on the actors, and as new tools become available, so will the community of practice change and, thereby, the local knowledge. The term traditional knowledge does not capture this dynamism, for it implies a conservatism and, especially in South Africa in the context of apartheid, a static view of knowledge. This does not mean that local knowledge has no historicity. Certainly elements of traditional knowledge will be present, but such knowledge will be reconstituted in the immediacy of action. The use of the concept *ubuntu* by the teachers in Vignette 1 is an example of such reconstitution.

In the context of planned social transformation, "exogenous" knowledge will reflect the local knowledge of the change agent's community of practice. When such persons are formal representatives of state bodies or NGOs, they are likely to be embedded in a very different world from that of the focal communities within which they apply their knowledge. Many agents for change will have been trained in tertiary institutions, such as agricultural and nursing colleges, or have been formally taught theories and concepts in their particular field of specialisation. In addition to this, they represent the world of science and serve as carriers of such formal knowledge.

In many Third World settings, including South Africa, the sharpest division between the communities of practice is likely to be the level of literate practices in operation in each context. Olson (1989) and Ong (1982) have shown how involvement in literate practices fundamentally changes thought. Literate worlds are realms populated with powerful tools for thinking that enable one to come to know things without first-hand experience; document ideas and experiences in written forms, thereby storing information independent of personal or collective memory; and document and process numerical information in complex ways. Perhaps more fundamental than this, however, is that becoming literate changes one's relation to language. As Donaldson (1978) has so strongly argued, formal education and literacy enable one to disembed oneself from the intentions and context of language and deal with the formal logic of thinking.

As discussed, formal thought stands in strong contrast to the contextual embeddedness of everyday knowledge. Family planning campaigns; health education programmes; and agricultural, sanitation, and water projects are built on a core of universal principles. Whereas good programmes should be tested in practical trials, they are still constructed around principles that supposedly apply across contexts. The plans and recipes for change used by change agents tend to be built on such premises.

Agents for change will bring such formal knowledge and forms of thinking from their communities of practice into focal communities. The gap between such knowledge and that of the focal community will fundamentally affect the nature of the interaction between these sets of actors.

In the next section, the dynamics of the meeting of such systems of knowledge are examined.

The Meeting of Minds

Building on the ideas presented in the preceding section, contact between agents for change and "focal" communities can be understood as a meeting of different communities of practice. Each community of practice has established ways of defining tasks, setting goals, engaging in action, and using "tools" in their activities. They bring these with them when they meet and use these frameworks

when they engage in joint development activity (such as socialising a child or producing food as depicted in the two vignettes). This joint activity provides the space within which the potential for change emerges. This dynamic is depicted in Figure 1. The dotted line between the communities of practice represents a permeable boundary, across which there may be interaction outside the particular joint activity.

The two communities of practice are not neutral in their relation to each other. Whereas local knowledge, within each community of practice, has power in that it serves as a resource for decision making in everyday life, such knowledge may have greater or lesser power when it is used in engaging in joint activity with people from different communities of practice. The introduction of a new technology, for example, makes certain forms of knowledge obsolete. What use is there in knowing how to use a manual typewriter in the era of computers?

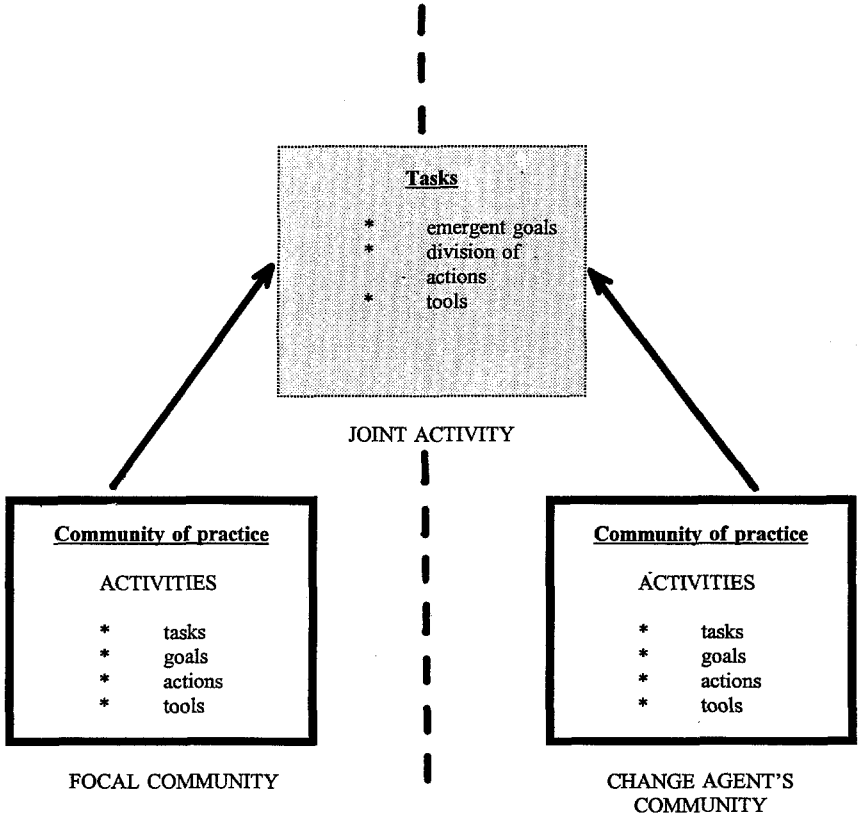

FIGURE 1 The engagement of change agents and members of focal communities in joint action.

The issue of power in the joint activity is also tied up with access to resources. The change agent usually has access to a world of material or ideational resources not immediately available to local community members. Thus, for example, the farm school teacher is more knowledgeable about the educational needs for life in urban areas and is the one who ensures the child gets the certificate to "escape" rural life. Similarly, the extension officer has access to knowledge about seeds, agricultural equipment, and government policy on agriculture, issues to which the local farmer has limited access. The introduction of new technologies, whether they be in the form of techniques or material artifacts, invariably requires maintenance or support from an "outsider." These circumstances place the change agent in a considerable position of power even when there is no willful attempt to coerce people into following a specific ideology or practice. The change agent is in the position to control the flow of information and determine the amount of access to resources. The dependency arising from such power is a well documented characteristic of development (Frank, 1978; Lewis, 1988).

The nature of the joint activity will determine the outcome of the engagement. Three possible outcomes that reflect different ways in which power relations are worked out in the joint activity are sketched in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

Scenario 1 is the situation in which the joint activity leads to the rejection of the change agent's community of practice, a withdrawal from further joint activity, and the establishment of less permeable boundaries between the two communities. In its most extreme form, the focal community will not only have become alienated from the change agent's community, but as a result of the interaction will also have become estranged from its own prior ways of doing things. This may have severe consequences for coping with everyday life as the "old ways" are lost and the "new

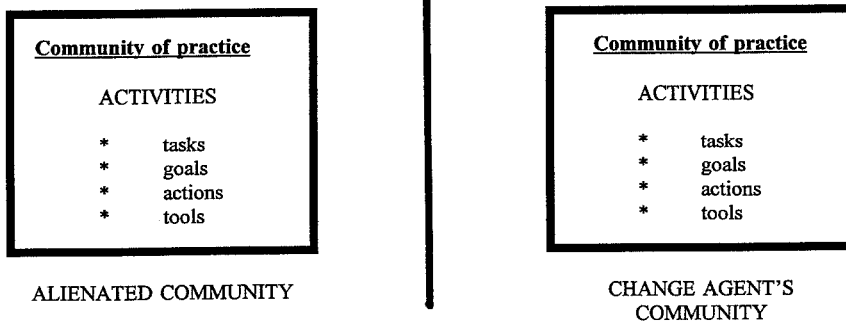

FIGURE 2 Scenario 1: Joint activity leading to the rejection of the change agent's community of practice.

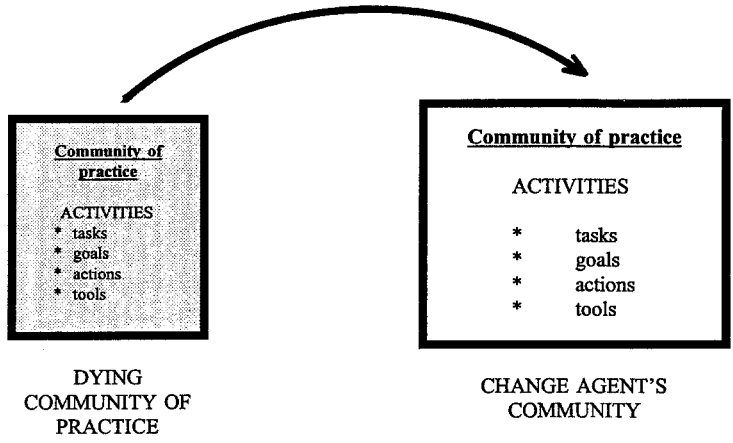

FIGURE 3 Scenario 2: Joint activity leading to the rejection of prior practices and the adoption of the change agent's community of practice.

FIGURE 4 Scenario 3: Joint activity leading to the emergence of a sustainable new community of practice.

ways" rejected. In its least severe form, the withdrawal may lead to practices in the focal community continuing as they did before, but local actors will be reluctant to engage in any future joint action with change agents.

Scenario 2 reflects the situation in which the joint activity has led to the abandonment of prior practices in the focal community and the adoption of the change agent's practices. In its most extreme form, it may lead to the rejection of prior practices and the uncritical adoption of the alternative community of practice. In such circumstances, the wisdom and richness of prior local knowledge, and the meaning that goes along with it, will be lost to the focal community members. Furthermore, the change agent's community of practice will not have benefited from the joint activity, other than acquiring new members who will be, initially at least, novices in the new system and disadvantaged relative to people with greater local expertise. In its most benign form, some members will be lost from the focal community, but the viability of the focal community's practices, which in some areas of life may be entirely appropriate to the local situation, becomes threatened.

Scenario 3 reflects the circumstances in which the joint activity generates new emergent goals, actions, and technologies that draw on both communities of practice. Should the joint action form an emergent, new community of practice, then a firm base for further joint action is created. In such a scenario, the local knowledge of both prior communities of practice is employed and a new dynamic established in which new local knowledge is created.

This scenario is the most creative of the outcomes and one likely to minimise domination and conflict. To achieve it, however, it is necessary to maximise the opportunities, provided in the joint activity, to create new and sustainable communities of practice in which both sets of actors participate in the construction of new forms of meaning and understanding.

MAXIMISING THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW JOINT COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

From the framework presented here, some suggestions can be made regarding the maximisation of the joint activity to produce new communities of practice.

As mentioned, local knowledge is invariably tacit knowledge. The potential for the domination of knowledge will increase when both sets of actors are unaware of how their own local knowledge is structured and determines their actions and interactions. Parents in Vignette 1, for example, were largely unaware of how the teachers' understanding of *ubuntu* differed from their own understanding and how this worked against their achieving the socialisation goals they set for their children. Perhaps, then, the most fundamental challenge for the actors in any process of engagement is to become aware of their own local knowledge and how this differs from the local knowledge of other actors.

There would appear to be two steps in relation to this process. The first is to make explicit the local knowledge that both sets of actors tacitly use in their everyday lives and interactions. The second is to enable members of both communities of practice to examine the value as well as limitations of their local knowledge, so they are able to negotiate what they need to take into the emergent community of practice. In this latter process, development agents need to become aware of the formal and disembedded nature of their knowledge and develop a sensitivity to the limitations and possibilities of such knowledge for local action. At the same time, members of the "target" communities need to be given opportunities to test the applicability of their knowledge to the changing circumstances linked to social transformations.

Making explicit what is tacit should occur at all levels of activity. This includes:

1. Clarifying the implicit goals that the different actors have for engaging in ostensibly the same or joint activity. In Vignette 1, for example, while the parents and teachers shared the activity of socialising children to internalise *ubuntu,* they had different goals. The former aimed to provide children with a sense of common humanity, whereas the latter wished to establish a relationship of authority.
2. Coming to an understanding of how the sequence of acts in what appear to be similar actions may differ across communities, so that new sequences appropriate to the new sociocultural context can be constructed by both parties.
3. Revealing how dependent thinking is on the tools available for it and the extent to which the various actors have access to the required resources. In this regard, it is particularly important for change agents to recognise how their thinking relies on techniques and technologies, arising from being literate, to which many people in the Third World do not have access. Similarly, these actors should recognise the richness of techniques used in "oral" cultures to sustain memory, come to joint decisions, and enhance collective thinking (cf. Ong, 1982). The change agents have a critical role in reflecting on the power they have over determining what tools for thinking are considered useful or appropriate. Mechanisms to enable the voice of local people to be heard should be actively investigated.

Maximising the development of new communities of practice also requires attention to the structure of the engagement between the actors. A socially situated view of cognition stresses how central activity is in the construction of knowledge. It is in the joint activity that the new community of practice will be generated rather than simply the adoption of new ideas. In Vygotskian terms, it is in engaging in new practices with the mediation of more experienced others that humans come to act at levels beyond their existing competence, thereby constructing new ways of acting and understanding. This means that it is essential that the tasks for joint activities are carefully chosen, the division of labour for actions are carefully apportioned, and the tools for thinking made available where existing means are

limited or absent. Once again, an analysis of who determines the tasks and apportions responsibility is essential for a balancing of power in the interaction. Maximising the participation of actors in the focal community, in as many actions as possible, is crucial if both parties are to be able to generate, then practice, and finally appropriate new ways of thinking. This includes participation at all stages of the planning, implementation, and maintenance of development programmes.

Psychologists, although having a wealth of theories and expertise to examine and reveal the content and psychological dynamics of the meeting of minds in such engagements, are conspicuous by their absence at this level of community and rural development. There are new roles awaiting psychologists in this area of social transformation, especially in the Third World. In this respect, the growing experience, theory, and knowledge generated by people-centred approaches to development (cf. Korten,1990; Max-Neef, Elizalde, & Hopenhayn, 1989) provide a useful philosophical and conceptual resource. Similarly, participatory approaches to research and action, especially Rapid Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rural Appraisal perspectives (Chambers, 1994a, 1994b), provide a valuable source of designs and techniques for action. These techniques specifically attend to the relations of power in development practice. They provide ways in which local knowledge can be made explicit and activities constructed to give people the space to explore options and make choices without risking the disruption or destruction of limited material resources.

CONCLUSION

The meeting of minds that occurs when people from different communities of practice confront each other in the process of social transformation is inevitable. Such encounters can provide moments for the generation of new and more appropriate ways of thinking or moments for the destruction or breakdown of life worlds. Through an analysis of the structure of activity and recognising the sociocultural origins of thought, it has been argued that the direction the encounter takes depends on the how the actors engage in joint activities to construct new knowledge, built on the local knowledge of the communities of practice from which they come. This engagement must lead to each form of local knowledge being made explicit. Using this as a base, the joint activity must be constructed so as to allow the participation of all parties to work toward a new community of practice and consequently a new local knowledge. Psychologists have an important role to play in facilitating the mediation processes in operation in such engagements in order to maximise the empowering qualities of social transformation.

The starting point is to listen to the small voices and assist such voices to become louder. This forms the basis for the negotiation of new knowledge, and in the process, perhaps, the small voices will form a new wind rather than be pitched against it.

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