

"Education as transformation" and education as **desarrollo**: A comparison of two models for educating healers

Experiences of transformation:

Beginning with the initial "opening of the brain", transformations of consciousness are a central dimension of the medium's **desarrollo**. Through the "opening of the brain" the mediums begin to experience a different kind of reality which involves the existence of a spirit world. They have to transcend feelings of fear, anxiety and confusion in order to be able to use the healing resources of the spirit world not only for their own benefit but for the well-being of the community. Similar to !Kung and Fijian healers, the spiritist medium connects with the spirit world for the purpose of "transcending the self to channel transpersonal resources to the community" (Katz, in press-a, p. 15).

Transformations of consciousness are involved in every experience of **pasar** a spirit or in any kind of contact with the spirit world. As the mediums begin to have control of the mediumistic trance, the experiences with the spirit can no longer be considered "altered states of consciousness" but "alternate states of consciousness" (Zinberg, 1977). The trance state is not experienced by the mediums as a deviation from the way consciousness should be, it is seen as a

different state of consciousness. Through the trance state, they experience themselves as existing beyond their ordinary level of existence.

Education as transformation, like education as **desarrollo**, emphasizes the role of transcendence in the development of healers. Transcendence has been considered by several authors as a fundamental need in the process of human development (Katz, 1970; Maslow, 1971; Menary, 1982; Murphy, 1975). Transcendence has been defined by Menary as

...the experience of moving beyond one's ordinary state of mind, beyond the ordinary structures of self and of reality... In the process of transcendence one's whole being is affected--one's perception, sensations, thinking, and emotions. The everyday experience of reality--the boundaries of the self and others--dissolve or are shattered and in this dissolution a new experience of reality emerges (1982, p. 5).

This definition of transcendence applies very well to the mediumistic trance state specifically and to the process of becoming a medium in general. At the spiritist meeting, mediums experience change in sensing, perceiving, thinking and feeling. Their sense of identity is altered as they come in contact with the spirit world, manifesting the identity of the spirits. Mediums reported that in the spiritist meeting they stop thinking about their "material" problems, concentrating just on the spiritual work. Others said that

they have been able to work as mediums even when they were feeling very sick because all the symptoms disappeared as they made contact with the spirit world. At the spiritist meeting mediums have to transcend themselves in order to find healing resources for the community.

The connectedness experienced by the healers with the spirit world and the community as described in education as transformation is also present in education as **desarrollo**. The spiritist mediums are in essence intermediaries between the spirit world and the community. Their most important role is to serve as bridges to the spirit world, so that community members can have the opportunity to experience this dimension. The spiritist healers call themselves "mediums" because they are channels of a healing power which does not reside in themselves. The spiritist meeting is the best example of the connectedness between mediums, the spirit world and community members.

Although a process of envisioning characterizes the education of spiritist mediums as well as education as transformation, there are differences in terms of how envisioning is manifested in the life of the spiritist medium. Most of the time the visions a medium may have at the beginning of his/her career do not involve a calling from the spirits. Usually the calling to become a medium is not a

direct and explicit one. It seems that by having several experiences with the spirit world, the mediums understand and feel that they have to become a medium. For several mediums in this study, becoming a healer was a decision they had to make in order to overcome an initial emotional crisis. They realized that if they did not make an effort to become mediums, they would continue suffering from the emotional crisis. They had to make a commitment with the spirit world to dedicate their lives to helping others. For another group of mediums the commitment has grown out from their own desire to adopt the healer's role and the need to use what has been given to them to help others.

Transitioning seems to be an element which characterized both kinds of healer's education. Education as **desarrollo** emphasizes transitioning rather than stages achieved. Most of the mediums do not conceive of **desarrollo** as a "progression through invariant ordered sequential stages" (Kolhberg and Mayer, 1978, p. 128). The concept of "development" as elaborated by cognitive-development theory does not seem to be the goal of "education as **desarrollo**". The changes produced by the process of **desarrollo** are not irreversible, sequential, hierarchical or unidirectional. Although mediums are classified into three major categories (in-development, partially-developed and fully-developed),

this classification is mostly applied to the development of **facultades**, not to the medium's **desarrollo** as a whole process. The majority of the mediums expressed the idea that one never becomes a fully-developed medium because one is always in **desarrollo**. Similar to education as transformation, **desarrollo** emphasizes process and experience rather than structures (Katz, in press-a). What is essential is not becoming a fully-developed medium, but to use this process for community healing.

Transitioning is also intrinsic to the medium's relationship with power. The **facultad** is neutral, it can be used to help as well as harm. At the beginning mediums make the commitment to use their power for doing good, but this commitment is tested throughout their entire careers. Several mediums mentioned that they have been asked by clients to perform witchcraft against others. They have been offered money in order to do harm to other people. Mediums have to confront these challenges and reevaluate their commitment to using the **facultad** only for healing.

One of the mediums in this study said that she was involved in the practice of witchcraft several years ago. However she understood that in doing this, she was surrounding herself with a group of ignorant spirits who were also affecting her. The medium realized that to be involved

in witchcraft is a very dangerous practice and stopped using it. Another medium told the story of a man who offered her a lot of money if she would destroy a marriage. At that time the medium was confronting severe economic problems and this petition was a great temptation. However she was able to resist the offer, telling the man to leave her house.

As the power of the medium increases, he or she is more vulnerable to using it for purposes other than healing. Commenting on this issue within the context of education as transformation Katz and Kilner (in press) wrote: "The most powerful Fijian healers are the most vulnerable to abusing that power - and thus losing the power and the straight path totally" (p. 42). Education as **desarrollo** emphasizes that the mediums have to use the **facultad** only for healing because if not, the mediums may lose it. To lose the **facultad** means that the spirit guides abandon the medium because they are dissatisfied with the way the medium is using his/her power. Without the protection of their spirit guides, mediums are under the influence of ignorant spirits which make them susceptible to suffering an **obsesión**.

Mediums may also lose their **facultades** if they refuse to help those who are in trouble. Education as **desarrollo** stresses that the purpose of having **facultades** is to serve others, not to accumulate power. Spirit guides will abandon

a medium if he/she is not using the **facultad** to help others. An example of this was presented in the life story of Generosa. She lost some of her **facultades** because she refused to work as a medium for several months. Mediums also indicated that one may lose the **facultades** if one's behavior is not morally appropriate. Education as **desarrollo** establishes a set of moral standards that a medium has to follow in order to increase his/her power.

The medium's relationship to power is a dynamic one because they do not see themselves as possessing the power but being channels of it. Similar to education as transformation, education as **desarrollo** is oriented toward the regulation, not the possession of the power (Katz and Kilner, in press). Mediums depend on the spirits in order to heal someone but at the same time the spirits depend on the medium to manifest their power. The healing power comes out of this reciprocal relationship between spirits and mediums. They need each other in order to accomplish the goal of healing. In the spiritist meeting, the healing power is generated by the effort of the spirit world, the mediums and the community.

Transitioning as a process permeates the medium's **desarrollo**. The medium's **cuadro espiritual** is in continuous change, some spirit guides leave the mediums while new ones

come to substitute them. In addition, mediums pointed out that sometimes the spirit guides do not come when they wish them to because the guides are busy doing other things. The control that a medium has over the spirit world is a very relative one. As one experienced medium declared: "Sometimes my guides make a fool of me because they do not come when I ask for their help". Another medium remarked: "There are times in which it is difficult for me to contact the spirit world".

Centrality of the spiritual dimension:

Be it in symbol, in mind, in memory, or in felt presence, we, the living, stay connected to them, the dead, and sound our connectedness in language and in heart. The dead do not leave us, they are too powerful, too influential, too meaningful to depart. They give us direction by institutionalizing our history and culture; they clarify our relationship to country and cause. They immortalize our sentiment and visions in poetry, music, and art. The dead come to inform us of tasks yet to be completed, or struggles to be continued, of purposes to be enjoined, of lessons they have learned. We need the dead to release us from obligations, to open new potential, to give us belongingness and strength to continue with our lives (Bertman, 1979, p. 151).

The spiritual dimension is also a major focus of education as **desarrollo**. For the mediums, the reality of a transpersonal or spiritual realm is based on lived experiences, not just on beliefs based upon faith. For them,

spirits are not abstract concepts or symbols for explaining reality. They can see the spirits, hear their voices and experience their reality in the mediumistic trance. Mediums are in constant interaction with the spiritual dimension, which leads them to integrate this dimension into their ordinary lives. The spiritual dimension is not only relevant at the spiritist meeting or the **consulta**, it penetrates the medium's being-in-the-world. What Katz and Kilner (in press) wrote about the relationship of the Fijian healer with the spiritual dimension is also relevant for the spiritist medium:

The closeness of the spiritual dimension does not lead to a disrespect or diminution of its power. Instead, the closeness generates a familiarity, even an intimacy with that dimension, thus preventing it from being considered as separate from ordinary life (p. 38).

The familiarity and intimacy with the spirit world is manifested in the mediums' life-stories in many ways. Several mediums referred to their spirit guides as being "friends". Others thought that spirit guides were their relatives in past lives. Two mediums declared that the guides were an invisible family for them. Aurea described how when one of the spirits from her **cuadro espiritual** leaves her, she feels like part of her heart is missing.

Spirit guides and other kinds of spirits are not seen as

perfect beings, but as possessing human attributes. Thus, spirits have human emotions, feelings, and physical characteristics. Although at a theoretical level spirits are not considered to be male or female, at the practical level spirits are assigned a specific gender. Spirits are not conceived of by the mediums as "supernatural" or "superhuman" beings. Within the context of education as **desarrollo**, the concept of "human spirits" (Lambek, 1981) is more relevant to understanding the nature of the spiritual dimension. It is the human nature of the spirits that provides the basis for the medium's familiarity and closeness with the spiritual dimension.

The spirit world is constantly intervening in the medium's life. Sometimes these interventions may cause a degree of disequilibrium in their lives. For instance, Miriam was asked by the spirit world to have another child at a time when she and her husband were planning not to have more children. She experienced distress because first she was unsure about the authenticity of the communication and second, her husband did not want to have another child.

At other times the intervention of the spirits is a positive one. Mediums described how spirit guides help them by offering advice and support when they are confronting a difficult decision. Mediums feel empowered by the presence

of spirit guides. Most of the mediums refer to spirit guides as spiritual teachers who are inspiring and motivating them to develop their potential. Spirit guides are also considered to be a source of creative inspiration. Some mediums reported that the guides "transmit" poems, songs and messages to them (Juanita, Miriam, Luisa, Peruchfn). Don Félix wrote a book which was dictated to him by a group of spirits. Diana, Luisa and Marcos also felt that they were helped by the spirits when they were taking school examinations.

However, not all the spirit guides are prepared to be of assistance to the mediums and some of them have to be educated by the mediums. These guides are usually testing the mediums' character by suggesting that they do things which are against their moral values. For instance, Luisa was asked by some of her guides to charge money for her services. She followed this recommendation for a week but then realized that to charge money for the healing work was not morally appropriate. Luisa decided to teach her guides that it is not right to charge money to people. Similarly Ernesto had to confront one of his guides who is a Catholic priest because the guide was constantly trying to convince him to become a priest. Mediums do not seem to follow the recommendations of spirit guides without evaluating their

consequences.

Mediums are also responsible for the education of other spirits who belong to their **cuadro espiritual**. After being helped by the mediums, these spirits may become guides for them. For instance, in Aurea's **cuadro espiritual** there was a spirit who at first wanted her to drink alcohol. However, Aurea began to talk with the spirit, convincing her (the spirit) that to drink alcohol was dangerous to her health. Through a long process of education, the spirit became a guide for Aurea. It is interesting to point out that Carl Jung addressed the issue of the education of "spirits" in his book Memories, Dreams and Reflections:

...the souls of the dead know only what they knew at the moment of death, and nothing beyond that. Hence their endeavor to penetrate into life in order to share in the knowledge of men. I frequently have a feeling that they are standing directly behind us, waiting to hear what answer we will give to them, and what answer to destiny. It seems to me as if they were dependent on the living for receiving answers to their questions, that is, on those who have survived them and exist in a world of change...(1961, p. 308).

The relationship of the mediums with the spirits is based on reciprocity and interdependency. The model of education as **desarrollo** emphasizes not only the **desarrollo** of the mediums, but also the **desarrollo** of the spirits. And the mediums' and spirits' **desarrollo** depends very heavily on the

desarrollo of the community in general. From the perspective of education as **desarrollo**, these three dimensions (community, spirits and mediums) have to be considered as a whole in order to understand the process of **desarrollo** and its implications for education.

The healer is not removed from the context of daily living:

The process of **desarrollo** does not remove the medium from the community's social life. However, becoming a medium may bring tensions with other family and community members who are opposed to the practice of **Espiritismo**. Six mediums (Miriam, Generosa, Diana, Aurea, Gela and Marcos) indicated that their spouses did not want them to become mediums. These mediums considered their spouses an obstacle to their **desarrollo**. Several others confronted problems with their parents when they were developing **facultades**. The medium's relationship with his/her daughters or sons may also be affected as a result of their involvement with **Espiritismo**. For instance, Mayo's daughter who is a Jehova's Witness does not want him to work as a medium because according to her **Espiritismo** is the Devil's work.

The mediums' relationship with the non-spiritist community may also become a conflictive one. Some mediums complained of being considered "witches" by other community

members (Áurea, Félix, Luz, Aida, Ernesto, Mayo and Generosa). Marcos has perceived a degree of rejection from some co-workers when they were told he was a medium.

Propaganda against the work of mediums is done by leaders of the major established religions in Puerto Rico. The official newspaper of the Catholic Church, El Visitante, is constantly publishing articles which criticize and condemn the practice of **Espiritismo**. The Catholic Church gives "workshops" throughout the Island to "expose the fraudulence of **Espiritismo** and to educate people about the right doctrine of the Church" (Colón, 1982).

Mediums in contemporary Puerto Rico have to overcome all of these obstacles in order to continue offering their services to those community members who believe in their healing power. Similar to Fijian healers, mediums are struggling against the attempt of the Christian religions to erradicate their healing practices.

As mediums gain popularity within the community, they may confront the problem of having to spend a considerable amount of time seeing clients. Several mediums in this study felt the need of creating some boundaries in order to have time for themselves and their family. Mediums have to learn to harmonize their work as healers with other responsibilities.

Service orientation of the healing work:

Similar to education as transformation, education as **desarrollo** stresses the healer's commitment to sharing the healing power with the community. The medium's **desarrollo** is a community-oriented process. The education of the medium rather than emphasizing "ego-development" is oriented toward the community's **desarrollo**. Service to others is what gives meaning to the mediums' **desarrollo**.

Mediums expressed their service orientation in several ways. Miriam emphasized that she wants to be a "twenty-four hour medium". She said that she goes to sleep in peace when she has been able to help someone to be happy. For her, as well as other mediums, to be a medium is a style of life dedicated to helping the community. As another medium expressed:

I need the satisfaction of helping others. This is what makes me happy. There is not a thing that makes me suffer more than not being able to serve others.

An old medium, Don Félix, declared that he would continue helping people until the moment of his death and also after it. He made the following point: "I do not need my eyes, ears or my hands to work as a medium. What I need is my will and my desire to heal people".

Inner development not manifested by changes in external status:

The criteria developed by Hahn and Katz (1985) to evaluate the presence or absence of this principle include two areas: material rewards and prestige. First, in relation to material rewards, education as transformation emphasizes that: "Income received by the healer for his/her work, if any, is only supplementary: it does not make the healer more wealthy than other members of the community" (Hahn and Katz, 1985, p. 5). Second, in relation to the issue of the healer's prestige, education as transformation considers that: "Public recognition and prestige may accompany the healing but not result in status change" (Hahn and Katz, 1985, p. 5).

Before exploring these issues with the mediums who participated in this study, it is necessary to explore what has been found by other researchers. After studying spiritist centers in New York for several years, Garrison (1977b) concluded that "most spiritist mediums gain little financially from their practice and often have to support the rent of the storefront themselves" (pp. 96-97). Similarly, in his study of *Espiritismo*, Harwood (1977) wrote:

Although I do not have figures from mediums on their incomes from spiritist activities, my impression is that their gains are not

sufficient to live on, since the six head mediums of **centros** whom I knew well all either held a regular job or had some other source of income (a working spouse or Welfare) (pp. 71-72).

Generally, **Espiritistas** in Puerto Rico are suspicious of those mediums who charge for their services. The attitude held by many **Espiritistas** is that good mediums should not get remuneration from the spiritual work because the healing power is a gift which has to be shared freely with people.

In order to understand the issue of material rewards, we need to see it as a continuum where on one extreme there are the mediums who charge a fixed amount of money for their services and on the other extreme there are the mediums who believe that they should not accept any kind of material rewards, not even thanks from their clients. None of the participants in this study charge a fixed amount of money for their services but several of them accept donations from their clients. All of them gave a similar explanation for not wanting to receive any payment for the healing work: "What one receives as a gift has to be given as a gift". Mediums also noted that to accept any kind of payment may upset their spirit guides. The guides may decide to abandon the mediums, leaving them very vulnerable to the influence of ignorant spirits.

It has been my experience in Puerto Rico that mediums

who charge for their services are a minority in comparison to the ones who do not accept any payment. Those who decide to charge need to get permission from their guides before doing so. Just the idea that the guides have to approve the medium's request functions as a mechanism against the practice of charging money for the healing work.

Some mediums in this study were open to receiving donations for their healing work at **consultas** (Ernesto, Félix, Gela). Others who were involved in giving **consultas** said that they did not accept any kind of donations (Aida, Luz, Aida, Diana, Generosa, Luisa, Gela, Mayo). Mayo and Generosa told me that their guides have prohibited them from receiving even thanks from clients.

Education as **desarrollo** maintains that mediums should not enrich themselves from their healing work. To benefit from the healing work by becoming more wealthy than other members of the community is seen by most of the mediums as exploiting and taking advantage of the community.

Character more important than technology:

The model of education as transformation, as well as the education of the spiritist medium, emphasizes the development of the healer's character as a central aspect of the healing process. According to both models, the learning of healing

techniques must occur within the most important context of character development. Effective healers are not only those who learn techniques but are those who transform their character in the process of becoming healers. As one of the mediums declared: "Honesty is the only technique that I use in my work".

Good mediums represent models of ideal personal development for the community. As is true of Fijian healers (Katz, 1981), becoming a spiritist healer means developing characteristics such as respect, love, compassion, honesty and commitment to the healing work. The spiritist healer believes that the best way to transcend the influence of ignorant spirits is to strengthen the character and behave in a moral way. Ignorant spirits like to be with those who are morally weak or those who do not have enough spiritual strength.

Mediums emphasized that in order to work as a medium one has to "prepare" (**preparar**) one's spirit. The concept of "preparation" involves a process of developing moral qualities and self-awareness about weaknesses and defects. The major principle of the medium's preparation is that "one cannot give what one does not have". As one medium pointed out: "If you are not prepared you cannot be helpful to anyone". The mediums have to cultivate their character as a

way of increasing their healing power and effectiveness.

When I asked mediums about the most important elements of their education, most of them emphasized **desarrollo** of their character, rather than **desarrollo de facultades**. **Desarrollo de facultades** is the technological dimension of spiritist healing. It means to learn how to control the trance state, how to interrogate the spirits, and how to give **despojos**, among other things. Although these elements are considered part of the medium's **desarrollo**, mediums did not seem to be very concerned about them. At the initial stage of the study, I found myself stressing healing technology while the mediums were interested in discussing the importance of the "qualities of the heart". After doing several interviews I understood that the mediums were trying to make me aware that for them "character precedes and provides the context for healing technology" (Katz, in press, p. 12). Education as **desarrollo** is oriented towards the **desarrollo** of the mediums' character rather than towards the learning of healing techniques.

A good and effective medium is mostly defined by the presence of moral qualities and virtues. Increasing healing power or **facultades** is seen as the result of the medium's **desarrollo** of character. Mediums believe that the good medium should cultivate the following qualities:

humildad (humbleness):

Not to believe that the healing power belongs to the medium. "One has to help others without trying to call attention to oneself." "A medium cannot believe that he is all knowledgeable."

honestidad (honesty):

"A medium should recognize that sometimes it is impossible to help someone." "If one does not see anything (an **evidencia**), one should not say anything."

amor (love):

"A person who is full of love is **desarrollada** (developed)." "Love for humanity is the basis of the medium's **desarrollo**."

perdón (forgiveness):

"One has to forgive those persons and spirits who have tried to cause harm to oneself."

respeto (respect) **y** **dignidad** (dignity):

"The respect toward others is not based on what they have but on what they are".

tolerancia (tolerance):

"One has to learn not to judge or criticize others."

These attributes are not only used to describe the good mediums, they also refer to characteristics that represent important values in the Puerto Rican culture (Saavedra de

Roca, 1963). Thus, education as **desarrollo** not only speaks about the ideal **desarrollo** of the Puerto Rican medium, it also considers the **desarrollo** of the Puerto Rican people in general.

The healer as a moral explorer:

The concept of the healer as a moral explorer also applies very well to the spiritist medium. One medium used the proverb "You can't preach about morals in your underwear" (**No puedes predicar la moral en calzoncillo**), referring to the idea that mediums should practice in their lives the moral values they are teaching to the community. The mediums recognize that they represent models of ideal behavior for the community.

The role of the mediums as "tester and definer of reality" for the community is a central one in education as **desarrollo**. It is in the process of helping community members to find meaning that the medium establishes the boundaries for the different experiences of reality (Hahn and Katz, 1985). In doing this, the medium becomes a "moral explorer" for the community.

Usually mediums see individual's problems as resulting from moral deviations. The emphasis is on helping the individual to behave in ways that do not attract ignorant

spirits. The belief is that ignorant spirits like to be with those who are not guided by moral principles. The **encausado** (client with a **causa**) has to become a moral example for the ignorant spirits who are harming him or her.

Mediums also have to become moral explorers not only for the community but also for themselves. As an Indigenous medium expressed: "Mediums have first to find themselves and then they may be able to find others." Mediums are continuously examining their lives, reflecting on the moral implications of their actions. One of them declared: "The biggest struggle is with myself, by working on my self I can be helpful to others."

In general this comparison between education as **desarrollo** and education as transformation reveals that these two models of healer's education share several important principles. Despite major socio-cultural differences between the Fijians, the !Kung and the Puerto Rican **Espiritistas**, all of them seem to educate their healers based on similar principles about the concept of healing and development. In the case of Puerto Rican **Espiritismo**, the data suggests that the model of education as transformation has cross-cultural validity. This thesis confirms other studies which have shown that "education as transformation" is a model with cross-cultural validity. Also, this thesis has helped to

put "flesh" on the model of education as transformation, bringing a rich data set to bear on the model. The details and dynamics of this model of healer education are made clearer by this thesis.