

BECOMING A MEDIUM IN PUERTO RICO:
THE PROCESS OF "DESARROLLO"

In this chapter I will examine the process of becoming a medium, beginning with an analysis of the "opening of the brain", the first stage in the development of a medium. Then I will discuss the process of **desarrollo de facultades** (development of faculties) which involves the control and regulation of the trance state. In the last section of this chapter I will compare the education of the spiritist medium with a model of healer's education developed by Katz (1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1982d, 1983, in press-a) called "education as transformation".

The First Contact With the Spirit World:
"The Opening of the Brain"

Indigenous mediums refer to the first stage of the **desarrollo de facultades** as the "opening of the brain" (**abrir el cerebro**). Some Kardecian mediums and mediums in transition also use this concept in the interviews. Through this process the medium is opening his or her brain in order to experience the reality of the spirit world. Through the opening of the brain the medium is preparing the spiritual

channels for the communication with the spirits. Most of the Indigenous mediums believe that the spirits "pass through their brains" (**pasar por el cerebro**) in order to communicate. When they do not want to communicate with the spirits, the mediums have to "close their brains".

The phrase "opening the brain" may give some indication of how dangerous, vulnerable and delicate this initial period may be for the mediums. One of the mediums, Doña Luisa, compared the opening of the brain with the unfolding of a rose, trying to explain the wonderful but delicate nature of this period. She also compared this process with the defloration of a woman.

The initial experiences which characterize the opening of the brain can be classified in several categories such as:

- hearing voices
- having premonitions about the death of family members
- dreams in which the spirit guide is met
- visions
- conversations with spirits
- feeling the "presence" of someone who is neither seen,
heard nor touched
- out of body experiences
- prediction of future events
- sensation of being touched by someone

- **pasar** spirits without being conscious of it
- automatic writing
- **obsesión**

For example, Miriam had her first experience with the spirit world through a dream in which she met her guide. Juanita began to have conversations with invisible friends when she was a child. At the age of five, Aurea had a vision of the Child of Prague. Others such as Luisa and Gela had premonitions about the deaths of family members. Aida and Luz heard voices telling them to hurt themselves, experiencing an **obsesión**.

An examination of the medium's life-stories reveals that 60% of them had their initial experiences with the spirit world in the adolescent years; 25% of them in their middle childhood and 12% of them in their young adulthood. Thus, for most of the mediums in this sample, adolescence was the period in which they began to have contact with the spirits.

Being an adolescent is in itself a very difficult developmental stage. One can imagine how difficult it was for most of these mediums to understand their experiences. Most of them seemed to experience a certain degree of distress in this first period. In a society in which the boundaries of reality are so well defined, it is "normal" to be distressed after having gone beyond these boundaries. It

is not easy for any one to begin experiencing things that society has labelled as abnormal.

The mediums' reactions to these first experiences may depend upon several factors. One needs to consider the degree of congruence or dissonance experienced by the mediums when they began to open their brains and their family's attitude toward the communication with spirits and **Espiritismo**. For example, some mediums indicated that when they were having these spiritual experiences, their parents and other family members considered them to be in the process of becoming mentally ill (Luisa, Félix, Áurea, Juanita, Gela). Some of the parents were opposed to the idea of letting their children attend a spiritist **centro** because they were Catholic. Eleven mediums came from families who were primarily Catholic, not **Espiritistas**. Consequently, these first experiences were not only distressing to the mediums but also to the entire family.

The degree of distress experienced by the medium in the initial stages may depend on how well they can integrate these initial experiences within themselves. According to Rogers (1980) those experiences which are incongruent with the self serve as a source of threat and usually are experienced as a form of anxiety. Consequently, all maladjustments come about through denial of experiences

discrepant with the self-concept. Similarly, Sullivan (1948) developed the concept of the "uncanny" to describe a set of relations which does not form part of the self-system of the person and, being outside of the person's usual cognitive processes, cannot be integrated into everyday life.

Some of the participants in this study described how in the beginning they struggled very hard not to become a medium (Juanita, Félix, Generosa, Aida). They did not want to open their brains. For instance, Juanita expressed that in the initial stage she did not accept her experiences with the spirit world, denying to herself and to others that she was becoming a medium because she was Catholic. Generosa said that she did not believe in **Espiritismo** and was constantly making fun of the mediums. She did not want to attend spiritist centers but her parents forced her to do so. For these mediums the first stage in their mediumship development involved the integration of the experiences with spirits into the structure of their lives so that they could achieve a degree of "congruency". Using Sullivan's concept, one may say that the mediums were able to expand their self-systems in order to accommodate a different conceptualization of the self and the world.

The **obsesión**

Seven of the 16 mediums talked about suffering an **obsesión** when they began to communicate with the spirit world (Félix, Juanita, Luz, Áurea, Aida, Generosa, and Peruchín). The **obsesión** is a state of mental disequilibrium or maladjustment in which the medium does not have control over his or her actions because of spiritual influence. The **obsesión** is produced when an ignorant spirit is dominating the medium's will in such a way that it is difficult for him or her not to follow the spirit's suggestions. The principal symptom of an **obsesión** is actual or feared loss of impulse control.

Mediums classify the **obsesión** into two major types: the conscious and the unconscious. The mediums who are suffering a conscious **obsesión** have a relative control over their actions but not over their thoughts and feelings. The mediums who are experiencing an unconscious **obsesión** are not able to control their feelings and thoughts or their behavior.

Five of the mediums experienced the **obsesión** in their adolescence (Peruchín, Generosa, Aida, Luz and Juanita) while the other two had it in their young adulthood (Félix, Áurea). Most of the time the mediums declared that they did

not remember this period very well, so it was difficult to get a clear picture of the symptomatology of **obsesión**. **Obsesión** seems to be a very broad concept which is used by the mediums to describe a condition characterized by one or more of these signs: running away from home, yelling and crying without any reason, loss of appetite, hearing voices of a suicidal nature and being aggressive towards others. One may speculate that depression is also a symptom of this syndrome.

The duration of these **obsesiones** range from a three month period (Félix) to a three year period (Generosa). Also for some of these mediums, the **obsesión** is a recurrent condition. Aida began to have her **obsesión** at the age of twelve and it was in her late twenties that she was cured, suffering various episodes of this condition during this period. Áurea experienced three **obsesiones** when she was a young adult and her last one was at the age of thirty-two.

The mediums used words such as **locura** (madness) and **problema de los nervios** (problem of the nerves) to describe the experience of **obsesión**. One of them, Luz, expressed that she was "hysterical". It seems that all of them recognized that they had a "mental disequilibrium" but they explained it as being caused by spiritual influence not by psychological factors.

Why did these mediums suffer an **obsesión**? All of them believe that the **obsesión** was a **prueba** they had to undergo in order to believe in **Espiritismo** because they were resistant to accepting their **facultades**. The **obsesión** is thought to be produced by the refusal to accept one's mediumistic experiences. In addition, Generosa suspected that maybe there were spirits in her **cuadro espiritual** who were suffering an **obsesión**. She and Luz also declared that having suffered an **obsesión** helped them to develop strong **facultades**. Generosa made the point that when a medium has experienced an **obsesión**, he or she is able to work more effectively with people who are mentally ill. All of the mediums see the **obsesión** as a learning experience which helps them to **desarrollar facultades**. The **obsesión** was also the experience that motivated them to attend spiritist meetings in order to look for help.

None of the 16 mediums interviewed in this study believe that suffering an **obsesión** is a requirement for becoming a medium. They consider that a person can **desarrollar facultades** without experiencing an emotional crisis. However, some of them believe that a medium who has suffered an **obsesión** is better prepared than the one who has not suffered one.

The mediums who did not experience an **obsesión** when

they were in the process of opening their brains gave me other explanations for the incidence of the **obsesión** in this initial stage. Luisa believes that there are people "who are born with a "weak nervous system" and they are not prepared to confront this kind of experiences. They cannot understand why they are having these experiences, becoming very confused. As Miriam explains: "When the medium's brain opens to the spirit world, the medium experiences a lot of pain because there are many things that she or he does not know". Other mediums explained that some mediums experienced this initial crisis because there is no one who can support and advise them (Miriam, Luisa, Ernesto, Marcos, and Emiliano). Marcos argued that there are some "psychic systems that are more vulnerable than others" and that the social milieu in which the medium grew up may have a role in the development of the **obsesión**. In general the mediums believed that prior contact with the practice of **Espiritismo** may prevent a person from suffering an **obsesión** because he or she will understand what is happening in his or her life, getting support from experienced mediums.

This last statement has some support from the life-stories of the mediums who suffered an **obsesión** in the beginning of their development. With the exception of Áurea, none of them were involved in the practice of

Espiritismo or had visited spiritist centers prior to the **obsesión**. They were not able to use the resources of the spiritist meetings before experiencing the **obsesión**. In some of the cases, the medium's family was against the practice of **Espiritismo** (Áurea, Juanita, Félix) and they did not want their children to visit spiritist centers.

The analysis of the mediums who did not have an **obsesión** reveals a different pattern. Most of them began to visit spiritist centers when they were children (Ernesto, Gela, Miriam, Marcos, Luisa, Diana, Rosa). (The other two mediums were young adults when they began to have contact with the spirit world). From these data one may ask the following questions: Does this initial socialization within spiritist practice help prevent the **obsesión**? Is this socialization helping the mediums to open their brains without experiencing a high degree of anxiety?

Ernesto's story is particularly significant in examining these questions. His parents are mediums who have a spiritist center. He grew up feeling that the experiences with spirits were completely normal. Moreover he was reinforced in having communication with the spirit world as part of his life. Becoming a medium was a natural pathway for expressing himself. Ernesto considered that developing facultades had been his "daily bread" since the time he was

born. His socialization as a medium started the day he was born.

Similarly, but to a lesser degree, Miriam's **desarrollo** as a medium was characterized by a strong involvement with **Espiritismo** from the time she was a little girl. She visited her uncle's center regularly. Her parents and grandmother were **Espiritistas**. As a product of this socialization, she wanted to become a medium. At the age of ten, Miriam thought that she would not mind suffering an **obsesión** if this was a requisite for becoming a medium. She was very attracted to the medium's role.

It seems to me that the degree of anxiety that a medium may experience in the initial stage of his or her development will depend on his or her capacity to make sense of this process. Prior socialization as an **Espiritista** helps the mediums to articulate and structure these "uncanny experiences", integrating them as part of their reality.

Based on the medium's conception of the opening of the brain, one may infer that this process is experienced relatively as "ego-dystonic" or relatively "ego-syntonic". When the opening of the brain is ego-dystonic, it is unwanted and a persistent source of distress for the person. He or she has strong negative feelings towards becoming a medium, perceiving the medium's role as undesirable and unacceptable.

From the medium's perspective, one can argue that the **obsesión** is a consequence of an opening of the brain experienced as ego-dystonic.

When a person wants to become a medium and is prepared to **desarrollar facultades**, he or she experiences the opening of the brain as ego-syntonic. The process is not experienced as alien to his/her conception of the self, but as compatible and consistent with it. Mediums will argue that when the opening of the brain is ego-syntonic, an **obsesión** will not occur.

Healing of the **obsesión**

The seven mediums who experienced an **obsesión** in the beginning of their **desarrollo** went to a spiritist center in order to be cured. It was in the spiritist center that they learned how to deal effectively with the **obsesión**. All of the mediums were told that they were in **desarrollo de facultades** and the **obsesión** was a sign of it. The **obsesión** was seen as an indication of their ability to communicate with the spirit world, not as a pathological or abnormal symptom that needed to be removed. It was explained that they were undergoing an **obsesión** because they did not have control over the spiritual forces that were trying to

manifest through them. Thus, the healing approach was oriented to teaching them how to have more control over the spirit world.

It was also explained to the mediums that there were ignorant spirits taking advantage of the situation, trying to harm them. Through the process of working the **causa**, these ignorant spirits were given light. Several of the mediums were told at the spiritist center that if they did not make an effort to **desarrollar facultades**, they would inevitably become ill again.

After having worked these **causas**, the mediums were ready to continue opening their brains to the world of the spirits but now with the support of experienced mediums. The scenario was prepared for the **desarrollo de facultades**.

A comment about the "normality" of the process of becoming a medium

It seems to be appropriate now to comment on the "normality" of the process of becoming a medium.

The experiences which characterized the process of becoming a medium such as hearing voices, spirit possession and visions have been traditionally explained as psychiatric symptoms. Consequently, shamans and other types of traditional healers who experience these states have been

considered by several authors to be mentally disturbed (Devereux, 1980; Linton, 1956; Spiro, 1967; Wallace, 1966).

As Devereux emphasized:

...there is no reason and no excuse for not considering the shaman to be a severe neurotic or even a psychotic in a state of temporary remission (1980, pp. 14-15).

In agreement with Devereux, Spiro (1967) based on a sample of only nine Burmese shamans, argued that they are drawn to their roles by a number of unresolved conflicts and painful frustrations. According to him, shamanistic possession is utilized to satisfy frustrated sexual, dependency and prestige needs. He concluded that the shamanistic recruit suffers from a neurotic conflict and that shamanism "serves to avert the outbreak of psychopathology" (1967, p. 229). In discussing the experiences of a Burmese villager, Spiro commented:

Although Mr. G's belief that he was possessed by a witch is entirely consistent with the cultural frame of Burmese witchcraft, and although his fellow villagers, therefore, fully share his belief that he was possessed, in my view his belief was no less irrational than if it had been inconsistent with it. For in both cases such a belief is based on an hallucination - on a confusion of fantasy with reality... (1984, p. 342).

Similarly Wallace (1966) considered that the shaman is a mentally disturbed individual with major identity problems. He described the last stage in the process of becoming a

shaman as a "controlled hysterical dissociability during which the shaman is able to visit, speak to, see, or be entered by his supernatural alter ego" (1966, p. 150). Silverman (1967) argued that there are significant similarities between acute schizophrenics and shamans and that the major difference between them is the degree of cultural acceptance.

Although this pathologizing approach is more characteristic of the 1950's and 60's, the bias persists now in a more subtle form. In the literature review on **Espiritismo** I have already discussed the presence of the psychiatric framework in the explanation of the experience of **pasar** the spirits or "spirit possession". Spirit possession has been explained as "the flooding of the ego by a return of the repressed" (Seda-Bonilla, 1969, p. 493) and it also has been related to the "Puerto Rican Syndrome" (Garrison, 1977a).

Usually psychiatric concepts such as "hallucination" and "dissociation" have been used to describe the process of becoming a medium. For example, Lubchansky et al. (1970) described an **evidencia** as a visual hallucinatory phenomenon. He wrote that hallucinating is regularly encouraged at the spiritist meeting, referring to the experience of seeing and hearing the spirits. Rogler and Hollingshead (1965)

presented the contrast between the pathological model and the emic perspective of the **Espiritista** in the following way:

If an individual reports hallucinations, it clearly indicates to the believer in spiritualism that he is being visited by spirits who manifest themselves visually and audibly. If he has delusions he is told that evil spirits are deceiving him about himself as well as about others; his thoughts are being distorted by interfering bad spirits, or through the development of his psychic faculties spirits have informed him of the true enemies in his environment (1965, p. 254).

Some researchers while admitting the limitations of the psychiatric model, continue using psychiatric terminology to describe the medium's experiences. For instance, Michtom (1975) emphasized that she wanted to avoid the pathological model in her study of **Espiritismo**, but she constantly used the concept of hallucination to describe the process of becoming a medium.

The research literature on **Espiritismo** suggests that the role of a medium is achieved through the successful resolution of a life crisis (Garrison, 1972; Koss, 1965; Lubchansky et al., 1970; Michtom, 1975). Lubchansky et al. (1970) interviewed 20 mediums and found that all of them described having experienced "episodes of severe mental distress". **Desarrollo de facultades** is seen as a cultural mechanism for the expression and resolution of pathological symptoms. These researchers argue that the medium's

desarrollo is not an illness but a process of being healed from an illness.

In my view, the major limitations of the psychiatric model for explaining the process of becoming a medium is its generalization from a small sample of mediums to all of them and its lack of recognition of the values of cultural relativity and diversity. First, I do not think that it is appropriate to make generalizations about the process of becoming a medium when this dimension is not yet well understood. Any conclusion about the normality of this process has to be limited to the specific sample studied. The reality is that there is not enough information yet to make clinical judgements about the medium's **desarrollo**. There has not been any empirical research designed to test the mental health of spiritist mediums. The administration of psychological tests to mediums in a culturally-sensitive way may shed some light on this important issue.

My clinical impression about the participants of this study is that most of them seem to be emotionally stable persons. I did not find evidence of mental disturbance in any of them with the exception of Mayo who confessed to me that he was in psychiatric treatment due to a **problema de nervios**. Although Miriam was seeing a psychiatrist in order to deal with her marriage problem, in my view she was

functioning as a healthy human being. However, I did not administer any test to the mediums to determine the presence of mental disturbance and therefore my observations are not based on empirical data.

Opposed to what Lubchansky et al. ((1970) found in his study, only seven of 16 mediums in my sample described having experienced any severe emotional distress while they were in **desarrollo de facultades**. In light of this finding, the argument that **desarrollo de facultades** is a mechanism for the resolution of an emotional crisis may have to be reevaluated. Although this may be the case for some mediums, it seems that a good number of them do not experience these crises. A future study should investigate whether there are any significant differences between these two kinds of mediums. Instead of examining the process of becoming a medium as if it were the same for all the mediums, it is important to recognize that the mediums have different life experiences which affect their mental health in different ways.

The other major limitation of the psychiatric model is its reliance on a Western conception of mental health and reality, without enough recognition for cultural relativity and diversity. By not recognizing the right of individuals and groups from other cultures to experience reality in a different way, the psychiatric model is enforcing a criterion

of normality that is not suitable for understanding the medium's experiences. As a model that is not culturally-sensitive, it tends to describe other ways of constructing reality as "abnormal", "irrational", "magical", "primitive" and "pre-scientific". By explaining the medium's experience with spirits as being a hallucination, the psychiatric model is defining it as pathological and as such invalidating the experience. Ackerknecht (19**) in criticizing this model expressed:

Psychopathological labeling seems to be foremost an expression for helplessness, a specific attitude of our culture toward the unknown... the psychopathological "diagnosis" gives, perhaps, emotional relief, but not a scientific solution of the incomprehensible (p. 33).

The process of becoming a medium is based on the paradigm of multiple or alternative realities (Bentov, 1977; Berger, 1977; Rogers, 1980). This paradigm emphasizes that ordinary reality is one of a number of realities and states of consciousness, as opposed to the conception that there is one reality with which everyone should be in contact in order to be considered "normal" and "mentally healthy". Mental health for the spiritist medium is the capacity to live in a world of alternate realities controlling the possibility of connecting with each of them at will. Relevant to this discussion is an argument made by Rogers:

It appears to me that the way of the future must be to base our lives and our education on the assumption that there are as many realities as there are persons, and that our highest priority is to accept that hypothesis and proceed from there. Proceed where? Proceed each of us, to explore open mindedly the many, many perceptions of reality that exist. We would also become more able to cope with the reality in which each one of us exists, because we would be aware of many more options (1980, pp. 104-105).

To follow this recommendation may lead to a new understanding of the process of becoming a medium. This kind of understanding will require a change of orientation toward reality or at least in respecting the different orientations that other individuals have. This attitude will make the difference between ethnocentric explanations of the medium's **desarrollo** and explanations which are more congruent with the culturally constituted reality of the medium.

Through the understanding of the medium's experiences of reality, I will continue examining the process of becoming a medium. In the next section, I will explore the dimensions of the **desarrollo de facultades**.

Desarrollo de Facultades

The concept of facultad

The **desarrollo de facultades** is an essential aspect of the process of becoming a medium. In this section I will discuss what **desarrollo de facultades** is according to the participants of this study. First, I will consider the concept of **facultad** as it is used in **Espiritismo**. According to the mediums, the **facultad** is the capacity to be an instrument or intermediary of the spirit world. In this sense it is impossible to be a medium without having **facultades**. Any power that a medium has is based on his or her relationship with the spirits. Peruchín, in trying to explain to me the nature of the **facultad**, compared the medium to a musical instrument, a radar and a microphone. Aida making a similar point said: "The **facultad** belongs to the spirits because the medium does not have any power".

There are different kinds of **facultades**. Usually mediums are classified according to the kind of **facultad** they have. For example, those who can see the spirits are called mediums **videntes** (seers). The mediums who can hear the spirits are called **auditivos** (auditives). There are others who have the **facultad** of feeling the presence of spirits and

they are called **sensitivos** (sensitives). The mediums who have the **facultad** of curing physical illnesses are called **sanadores** (healers). Usually mediums develop more than one **facultad** as they become more experienced.

Is the **facultad** an inborn capacity? With the exception of Miriam and Marcos all the mediums seemed to agree that the **facultad** is an inborn capacity. Luisa made the point that mediums are born "with something different in the brain". A popular expression among mediums suggests that one brings **facultades** to this world. Gela and Ernesto expressed that the **facultades** "are latent from the time one is born". Marcos and Miriam believed that what is inborn is not the **facultad** but the "predisposition or the potential to develop it".

The notion of inborn **facultades** acquires a new meaning when one considers the concept of reincarnation and past lives. The mediums believe that the **facultades** have not been given to them for free, but are the product of past life achievements and spiritual development. Although several mediums consider the **facultad** as a gift (**don**) from God, they made it clear that they have worked very hard in order to get it (Luisa, Félix, Aida, Generosa, Mayo, Luz, Juanita, Aurea, and others).

Why do some people develop their **facultades** while others

do not? The mediums responded by saying that it may depend on God's will, the kind of family and social environment the person is born in and the motivation of the person to develop **facultades**. Others felt that this was a great mystery. Emiliano compared the **facultad** to a person's intelligence because both of them have to be nurtured by environmental factors in order to develop and grow.

If a medium is in **desarrollo de facultades** this means that he or she already has them. Consequently the process of becoming a medium is not based on learning how to have or acquire **facultades** because they are already within the medium. The **facultad** is a capacity that no one can teach to others. Luz expressed it very well: "I cannot teach other persons to have revelations or to hear and see the spirits. No one can make you a medium". When a medium such as Juanita says that "a medium is born, not made", she is not telling us that learning is insignificant in the process of becoming a medium, but rather that the **facultades** cannot be learned the same way one learns for example, to type or to dance. She is not diminishing the role of learning in the **desarrollo de facultades** but emphasizing that the **facultades** are not acquired through any kind of training or education. Similarly, Peruchín declared that "the **facultades** are inborn but the medium needs knowledge and education in order to

expand them". And Diana compared the **facultad** with a "diamond that needs to be polished with knowledge and morals".

The **desarrollo de facultades** is an unfolding process in which the medium's **facultades** have the opportunity to emerge and expand. As their **facultades** are emerging, the mediums-in-development are involved in a learning process which usually takes place at a spiritist center. **Desarrollo de facultades** is a process based on learning how to control and regulate the **facultad** or power so that it can be used to help others.

Education in the spiritist center

The spiritist meeting is an event which involves three major processes that are interdependent: 1) participants are assisted with their particular problems and advised on how to transform their behavior; 2) ignorant spirits are given light or educated; 3) and prospective mediums have the opportunity to develop their capacities. These three components have to be seen as a whole in order to understand the meaning and structure of the spiritist meeting. One may examine the spiritist meeting as an educational experience which involves the interaction of mediums, participants and spirits.

All 16 mediums in this study began to **desarrollar facultades** within the context of a spiritist center. They were considered to be mediums-in-development (**médiums en desarrollo**), being assisted by other, more experienced mediums. The spiritist meeting provided a safe place in which to continue the exploration of the spirit world under the guidance of people who know this world. It is at the spiritist meeting that the blossoming of their **facultades** was facilitated.

Mediums refer to the **desarrollo de facultades** as a process of education for the medium. For example, Mayo noted that a person who will become a medium goes through a process similar to the child who attends school. Through my participant observation and interviews with mediums, I found that it is very relevant to look at the **desarrollo de facultades** as an educational process which involves several dimensions. In this section I will examine these dimensions.

The first point is that **desarrollo de facultades** is a process that varies from medium to medium. One of the reasons for this is that mediums develop different kinds of **facultades**. In addition, spiritist centers do not follow a strict formula for helping mediums to **desarrollar facultades**. Each spiritist leader has a unique way of educating the mediums-in-development. If one considers the different

spiritist practices, one will find that each of them has a particular model for the education of the medium. However, there seems to be a general framework which may apply to the different ways to **desarrollar facultades**.

All of the mediums in this study, with the exception of Emiliano, began to **desarrollar facultades** in indigenous centers. Some of them have moved away from indigenous practices but the first education they received was based on Indigenous **Espiritismo**. Therefore, in this discussion I will emphasize how a medium begins to develop **facultades** within Indigenous and Kardecian **Espiritismo**.

In the beginning, mediums-in-development experience doubts about the reality of their communication with the spirits. They are not sure if the information received by them at the spiritist meeting comes from the spirits or if it is a creation of their minds. Consequently they are afraid to give **evidencias** and to participate in the meetings. The spiritist leaders are aware of this problem and most of the time they ask the mediums-in-development not to restrain themselves from saying something that has been given to them. This period seems to be one in which the mediums develop self-confidence in their capacities. As they get positive feedback about their participation in the meetings, the mediums-in-development begin to have faith in their

facultades.

The education of mediums-in-development emphasize that it is through practice and observation that one can acquire the necessary "skills" to become an effective medium. There is a strong experiential component in the medium's education. As one of my informants expressed: "It is through practice and experience that one can become a good medium".

Desarrollo de facultades consists of several skills. First the mediums have to learn how to identify the good and ignorant spirits by the kind of **fluido** or vibration they are perceiving. As Mayo puts it: "One has to recognize what is in our brain". This is essential in the practice of mediumship because not knowing how to discriminate between good and ignorant spirits may lead the medium to follow the recommendation of the ignorant ones.

Most of the mediums described the **fluidos** of ignorant spirits as being hot, uncomfortable, unpleasant, heavy, and anxiety-provoking. Generally, the **fluido** of an ignorant spirit produces physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches and back pains. If the spirit died from a physical illness, the medium may feel the symptoms of the illness. In contrast, the **fluidos** of good spirits are described as being cool, pleasant, refreshing, cheerful, soft and peaceful.

Perceiving a **fluido** helps the medium to identify the kind of spirit that is trying to **pasar** through her or his brain. The medium has the opportunity to be prepared and to decide if he or she will open the brain to the influence of the spirit.

Another important step in the **desarrollo de facultades** is learning how to concentrate. Indigenous mediums described this important skill as being able to forget the material things and to concentrate absolutely on the meeting. Mediums in the Kardecian movement talked about learning to meditate as an essential step toward becoming a medium. Several times in an indigenous meeting, mediums-in-development were asked to "lift their thoughts" or to "unite their thoughts" in order to communicate with the spirit world. Most of the times prayers were used to facilitate this "unity of thoughts". Kardecian centers used music as a facilitator of the meditation.

Whether it is a meditation or a unity of thoughts, the fact is that it is essential that a medium achieves a particular mental and emotional state in order to communicate with the spirit world. It seems that in both traditions it is recognized that the mediums' reception of the spirit world will be improved if they know how to concentrate or meditate. If the reception is better, there will be less interference

from the medium's mind.

After being able to have good concentration and to perceive the **fluídos**, the medium is prepared to **pasar** or **incorporar** the spirits. With the exception of Emiliano, all the mediums in this study developed this **facultad**. To develop this **facultad** means that one is capable of **pasar** good as well as ignorant spirits. None of the mediums in this study used the word "possession" to describe this experience. The concept of possession has a negative connotation for them because of its relation to the concept of the Devil and demonic possession. For the mediums it is not really "possession" that is taking place when they go into trance because for them, this concept implies a lack of control over the spirit manifestation.

Indigenous mediums use the concept of **pasar** or **tomar** the spirit to describe the experience of "trance possession". They believe that the spirit goes into their brains in order to communicate through them. Some of them explain that their own spirit leaves the body when they go into trance. On the contrary, Kardecian mediums argue that it is impossible that a spirit can enter into the medium's brain. What happens when a medium is incorporating a spirit is that he/she establishes a connection with the **fluído** of the spirit.

Pasar the spirits involves trance behavior which varies

from medium to medium in terms of degree of consciousness experienced when entering the trance. (Instead of using the concept of possession trance, I will refer to this experience as the "mediumistic trance"). Based on the mediumistic trance, mediums are classified into three types: "conscious", "semi-conscious" and "unconscious". The conscious mediums are the ones who remember almost everything the spirit has communicated when they are in trance. The semi-conscious mediums are those who remember part of the spirit communication. The unconscious mediums do not remember anything or very little of the communication given by the spirits through them.

For the mediums, the kind of mediumistic trance is an indication of the degree of control they have over the trance state and the degree of their personal intervention. Of the 16 mediums in this study, seven of them are conscious mediums (Emiliano, Luisa, Juanita, Mayo, Miriam, Luz, Marcos) and four of them are unconscious (Generosa, Aida, Dinora, Gela). Four mediums said that they are conscious in some trance states but unconscious in others depending on the situation (Félix, Áurea, Peruchín, Ernesto). One medium, Rosa, is semi-conscious while experiencing the mediumistic trance.

According to the mediums, the two major kinds of mediumistic trances, unconscious and conscious, have

advantages as well as disadvantages. Mediums consider that the advantage of being unconscious is that there is little or no participation by the mediums in the spirit communication. In other words, the spirit communication is considered more authentic and reliable. In the unconscious trance, there is little interference by the medium in the communication. On the other hand, the major disadvantage of the unconscious trance is that the medium has less control over the trance behavior. Consequently the medium may not be able to control the inappropriate vocabulary and behavior of an ignorant spirit. If the unconscious mediums do not have enough "preparation", they run the risk of being manipulated by the ignorant spirits.

Conscious mediums have more control over the vocabulary and behavior of the spirits, but at the same time they are in danger of contaminating the spirit communication with their personal desires and feelings. In the beginning they also may be afraid of working as a medium because they are not in a deep trance. This is demonstrated in the development of Generosa who at the beginning wanted to be conscious in the trance but felt too many doubts and fears. She had to become an unconscious medium in order to work as a medium.

Whether experiencing a conscious or unconscious trance, the mediums-in-development must learn how to have some

relative control over this trance state. Control of the mediumistic trance means that the mediums are capable of regulating their physical movements, the vocabulary of the spirit and the trance behavior as a whole. For example, a medium has to learn not to fall down and roll on the floor when he or she is in trance. In addition, the medium who goes into trance should be able to have control over the aggressive impulses of ignorant spirits. Mayo told me the story of a medium who in a meeting went into an unconscious trance and was impulsed by an ignorant spirit to go out of the center and to look for a knife in order to kill himself. Mayo had to follow the medium in order to take the knife away before he killed himself. Diana, who is a medium-in-development, had to be held by other mediums when she went into trance because she could have hurt herself or others.

Although Gela is an unconscious medium, she declared that "it is easier to educate conscious mediums" because they are able to control the spirit's language. According to her, unconscious mediums have to work very hard in order to control the trance state. Unconscious mediums believe that they have control over the mediumistic trance because they have educated themselves and they receive help from their spirit guides. The spirit guides are responsible for

controlling the actions of the ignorant spirits so that they will not cause harm while making a manifestation. Most of the time, ignorant spirits complain of being chained or not being able to move while they are talking through the medium.

Other mediums declared that the types of trance they experience depends on what kind of work has to be done. For example, Ernesto is unconscious when he goes into a trance state with ignorant spirits but he remains conscious while passing a spirit guide. Ernesto thinks that if a medium does not work a **causa** unconsciously, people do not believe in him or her.

In addition to learning to control what happens in the trance state, the mediums-in-development must learn to experience it voluntarily. They have to learn to go into trance when it is required and necessary to do so. The trance state by ignorant and good spirit guides has to be produced at will.

Another important aspect of the education of mediums is the identification and familiarity with spirit guides. As Juanita expressed: "The mediums have to recognize their guides as a mother recognizes her children". There are at least three major ways in which a medium-in-development can discover who his/her spirit guides are. First, a spirit guide may appear to the medium in a dream. This happened in

the case of Marcos and Miriam. Second, a medium can discover the identity of the spirit guide through a vision. Félix spent three days meditating on a mountain when he met his principal guide **Agüeybaná**. Third, other experienced mediums can help the mediums-in-development to identify their guides. They may say the name, physical appearance and character of the spirit guide to the medium-in-development. For instance, in a spiritist meeting Aida received a message from a medium in which she was told the name and physical characteristics of her spirit guide.

In addition to a principal spirit guide, mediums may identify other kinds of guides who are interested in working with them. As mediums develop **facultades**, they may need to be assisted by other guides who have certain kinds of specializations. For example, Miriam received a new guide who was a physician in order to help her in doing spiritual surgery.

The working of **causas** or the education of ignorant spirits is another skill that has to be learned by mediums-in-development. First, mediums have to learn to interrogate an ignorant spirit who is communicating through another medium. They also need to know how "to give light" to the ignorant spirits by convincing them that it is not right to harm people. Second, after the manifestation of an

ignorant spirit, a medium has to be able to remove the negative **fluídos** from his or her body. In dealing with the **causas** of other people, a medium has to be careful because he or she may be affected by them.

Another important skill a medium-in-development should learn is to interpret the **evidencias** (revelations or visions) they receive from the spirit world. Mediums in this study argued that one does not learn to receive an **evidencia**, what one learns is to understand and interpret it effectively. At the spiritist meeting mediums-in-development learn how to find meaning for the **evidencias** received and how to communicate this meaning in a sensitive way. Mediums expressed that one has to distinguish between an **evidencia** that can be shared with others and one that should remain a secret. Through **evidencias**, a medium may know things about a client which are very private and that should not be revealed in public. Confidentiality becomes a very important element in the work of a medium.

Evidencias are especially helpful in finding the source of a client's problems. An example from my field notes illustrates how, through an **evidencia**, a medium was able to discover a conflictive issue in the life of a woman:

A medium told a woman that her mother died from a heart attack and that she was feeling guilty because nobody was with the mother at the time

of her death. The woman responded affirmatively to the medium's remarks. She declared that she felt responsible for her mother's death. The medium supported the woman by saying that her mother's death could not be avoided by anybody. The mother was supposed to die at that time. The woman seemed to feel better after hearing the healer's explanation.

In general, the **desarrollo de facultades** is a process in which the mediums learn how to have control over the mediumistic trance, being able to communicate at will with good as well as ignorant spirits. The mediums-in-development learn to be more receptive to the spirit world and at the same time are able to effectively interpret the **evidencias** received from the spirits.

The Education of the Medium
and "Education as Transformation"

The education of the medium is not limited to the **desarrollo de facultades**. The unfolding of the **facultades** is only a dimension of a more global process known as the medium's **desarrollo**. While the **desarrollo de facultades** is a concept used for describing the process of becoming a medium, the concept of the medium's **desarrollo** is used in referring to the process of becoming and being a medium. After the unfolding of the **facultades**, the medium's education is oriented to the goal of the medium's **desarrollo**. The concept

of **desarrollo**, as it is used by the medium, refers to a process of continuous transformation experienced by the mediums as part of their healing work.

Although mediums have different conceptions of how **Espiritismo** should be practiced, the medium's **desarrollo** is guided by a set of principles and standards which are shared by most of them. It is the concept of **desarrollo** that give some unity to the mediums' life stories. The process of **desarrollo** is based on a model of healer education which I will call "**education as desarrollo**". Most of the mediums in this study tend to use the concepts of **desarrollo** and education as if they were synonymous. They believe that the medium's **desarrollo** is the medium's education. Based on this evidence it makes sense to examine **desarrollo** from an educational perspective.

In this section I will describe the major principles of education as **desarrollo** comparing it with the transformational framework, as presented in the model of "education as transformation" developed by Katz (1981, 1982a, 1982b, in press-a). I think that it is appropriate to do such a comparison for two major reasons. First, the model of education as transformation is deduced from data on traditional community healers. Thus the categories of this model may also be relevant to the education of spiritist

mediums. Second, if education as **desarrollo** supports the model of education as transformation, or is another example of that model, it would add further evidence for the validity of education as transformation as a model which could describe the education of traditional healers, and possibly guide the training of contemporary healers in a more culturally sensitive manner.

My qualifying paper suggested the value of this comparison (Núñez, 1986); in my thesis, I now have the opportunity to explore this comparison and its implications more in depth, and with access to more extensive data.

Principles of "education as transformation"

In his ethnographic research with the !Kung and the Fijians, Katz (1981) found that in these two diverse communities the education of healers is based on similar principles. First the education of healers in these communities is characterized by "a transformation of consciousness, a new experience of reality in which the boundaries of the self become more permeable to an intensified contact with a transpersonal or spiritual realm" (Katz, 1981, p. 71). This transformation implies an experience of transcendence which does not separate the

healer from the community but connects him/her with it and a transpersonal dimension. Education as transformation is oriented toward describing and understanding the interconnections between the healers, the community and the spiritual dimension. While the literature in the West has emphasized the study of altered states of consciousness separated from the community and a spiritual context, the model of education as transformation stresses the essential role of these experiences in community healing and the healer's education.

A very important element of this transformation of consciousness is the process which Katz (1981) calls "envisioning":

Envisioning is more than carrying out the intent of the first healing vision. It involves advice and instruction from a teacher, if there is one; subsequent visions; lessons learned from one's patients; and most of all the actual practice of healing and learning to live with that practice in one's community (p. 69).

Katz found that a Fijian healer begins his or her career by having a vision in which he or she is called by an ancestor to become a healer. In the first vision the healer makes the commitment to use his/her healing power for the benefit of the community, not for his/her own interest. These spiritual experiences connect the healer with "healing resources beyond the self" through a transformation of

consciousness. As Katz commented:

The first vision presents to the healer a new way of being and behaving, a new way of viewing him or herself as one now capable of directing mana toward healing (1981, p.69).

The healer's transformations are characterized by a process of transitioning, "the moving into and out of states of consciousness rather than achieving a stage, regulating healing power rather than possessing a certain degree of power" (Katz and Kilner, in press, p. 41). Transitioning is distinguished by a profound sense of vulnerability because the healer's increasing power also implies the danger of misusing and losing it.

As one can see, the model of education as transformation recognizes the central role of the spiritual dimension in the life of the healer (Katz & Kilner, in press). From his ethnographic research, Katz found that neither !Kung nor Fijian healers make distinctions between the spiritual and secular elements of life. They seem to integrate the sacred aspects of their careers into their daily lives. Education as transformation does not reduce the spiritual dimension to a psychological manifestation but tries instead to understand this dimension in the life of the healer from his/her point of view. In this model the spiritual dimension is understood as a meaningful reality for the healer and essential to a

better understanding of the healing process.

A second principle of the model is that the healers are not removed from the context of daily living, remaining "ordinary members of the community" (Katz, 1981). A third principle emphasizes the service orientation of the healing work, the healer's commitment to share the healing power with the community. The essential goal in becoming a healer is to "serve as vehicles that channel healing to the community rather than to accumulate power for personal use" (Katz, 1981, p. 72). This principle stresses the healer's commitment to love everybody and to help those who come asking for help. A fourth principle stresses that healers experience an "inner development" which is not manifested or "rewarded by changes in external status" (Katz, 1981, p. 72).

The emphasis on the development of character rather than healing technology is a fifth principle. The learning of healing techniques must occur within the essential context of the healer's character and development. As Katz (1981) wrote: "It is qualities of heart - courage, commitment, belief, and intuitive understanding - that open the healers to healing potential and keep them in the healing work" (p. 72).

Finally, from the perspective of education as transformation the healer is understood as a "moral explorer

and a tester and definer of reality" for his/her community (Hahn and Katz, 1982). The healer is considered to be an ideal for the community - one who struggles most intensely to be what the community wishes for itself to be. As Katz writes:

Healers are faced with the task of defining reality in their interaction with cultural mysteries. Defining reality, they impart meaning. Imparting meaning, they make judgments about morality...The community sends healers on a journey to new territories of experience, to formulate new questions of reality, meaning, and morality, and then it looks to them for guidance in these areas (in press-a, p. 16).

Several studies have been made to establish the relevance of education as transformation to settings beyond the original field sites. Education as transformation has been shown to be an appropriate description of healer education generally among hunter-gathers (Hahn and Katz, 1985); the training of counselors at a private university (Simonis, 1985); the training of Native American healers (Hampton, 1985); and the education of community psychiatrists (Cheever, 1984). This thesis attempts to generate further data that can be used to test the validity of education as transformation as a paradigm for healer's development and education.