

RESEARCH ACTION IN MANY WORLDS

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I have treated this paper as an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of my research interests and methods of inquiry. I came to this project believing that many factors beyond the intellectual and methodological details reported in articles contribute to the research process. Writing the paper has not changed my mind.

I have chosen to look at the evolution of my work over the last two decades rather than treat a single research experience. This choice sacrifices detailed examination of the factors shaping specific research activities for a broader look at the evolution of research concerns and approaches over a substantial period. I am presently more interested in trying to understand my own development over time than I am in analyzing particular events.

The paper is organized historically. I begin with a brief description of early experience that has shaped my professional life. The next section deals with "finding the field" of organizational behavior and applied behavioral science, and some formative experiences of research and consultation as a graduate student. The third section describes my experience as a young faculty member "learning the game" of action research. The fourth section discusses "expanding the league" in later years as I have extended my work to social change activities in international settings. Finally, I will discuss some observations about my own evolution and its more general implications.

Readers who would like to relate major themes in my work to this history may find a preview helpful. I think my work has been shaped by four central concerns that have emerged over the years: (1) a concern with social development and social justice, particularly with respect to improving relations between unequally powerful groups; (2) an effort to combine research and action in ways that produce both solutions to specific problems and new ways of understanding social systems (the "research action" of the title); (3) a commitment to working at the interfaces among different groups, organizations, and cultures (the "many worlds" of the title); and (4) an interest in bringing multiple levels of analysis to bear on understanding social dynamics and problems. These themes have been only sporadically visible to me as I have lived this history, but I think they are quite clear in retrospect.

I. Growing Up

I was born a few months before the U.S. entered World War II. My father was a surgeon and my mother had been an elementary school teacher. They were both from

Boston "Brahmin" stock, with roots in the Quaker and Unitarian religious traditions. I was the eldest of their five children.

While my parents were and are clearly members of the U.S. "Establishment," they have also been genuinely committed for as long as I have known them to many of the ideals of democracy and social justice characteristic of the liberal tradition. I have clear memories of my mother's dismay at the racial prejudice and oppression in Texas when we lived there during World War II, and my father's visceral antipathy to corruption and abuses of power in any form have been equally obvious. I learned quite early that fairness and justice are important.

After the war my family moved from Boston to Bangor, Maine. I attended public elementary and junior high schools there. I was an academic success, which pleased (and rather startled) my parents. They arranged for me to skip third grade -- a decision that gave me intellectual stimulation but also placed me physically well behind my classmates. I was chubby, physically and socially slow, wore coke-bottle-bottom glasses, had braces on my teeth, and was comparatively well-to-do. This did not prove to be a formula for social success. My junior high school nickname was "Fatty." I got teased a lot and bullied a bit. I was painfully aware by the end of ninth grade that I was "out of it."

My parents wanted me to go to high school at their alma mater, Milton Academy, a private boarding school in Massachusetts. I was scared about going away, but I also recognized a chance to start over socially. I went filled with grim determination to be "one of the guys" rather than an outsider. This was the first of several physical and cultural "world changes" in my life. I suspect my experience would have been quite different had I remained in the Bangor school system.

That summer my body solved one problem by growing six inches and losing ten pounds, transforming me from chubby and slow, to gangling and uncoordinated. Athletic prowess was not going to be my road to social success. At Milton I found a strong peer culture that emphasized being "cool" and verbally facile. Good grades were admired, especially if they were associated with independence from or rebelliousness toward authorities. I became a smart maverick: skilled at verbal jousting, willing to challenge established norms, and getting good grades while remaining "cool" about academic work.

During my four years at boarding school, I also developed several close friendships at home in Bangor. These relationships provided a kind of personal closeness and support that was not available in the competitive climate of Milton. The experience of living simultaneously in the "preppy" world of an elite boarding school and the middle-class small-town world of Bangor was sometimes confusing, but I learned that there were people I liked and rewarding experiences available in both.

I entered Harvard in 1959 with many other Milton graduates, part of a transitional generation between the silence of the Fifties and the activism of the Sixties. I experimented with a variety of reference groups at Harvard. I joined some preppy clubs, but never became very interested in their activities. I was involved for a while with an alienated group of "Beatniks." I spent a lot of time and energy performing with and eventually leading a small singing group, which drew its members from a wide social and cultural spectrum.

I was intellectually interested but not inspired at Harvard. During the first two years I took required courses, did what was demanded, and got mediocre grades. In my junior year I got depressed, rebelled against requirements, stopped going to classes, and read

existentialism instead of course assignments. To my astonishment, my grades improved dramatically.

While I found most of my classes uninspiring, I was stirred by Tom Pettigrew's lectures on race relations. His obvious outrage at the injustice of white oppression of blacks and his disgust for personal prejudice and institutional racism struck a personal chord that remained largely untouched by the rest of my experience in college classrooms.

During the summer of my junior year I collected data for a city planning firm in a number of small New England towns. During a discussion of political issues in one town meeting, I was intimidated and silenced by a group who physically threatened anyone who questioned the House Un-American Activities Committee. While I had no particular views of HUAC at the time, I resented their tactics and disliked being intimidated. I was quite shocked to find that "freedom of speech" did not operate in that meeting, the Bill of Rights notwithstanding. I wrote a paper about the experience in the Fall, and did a study of the student conservative movement in the Spring, which reflected the first stirrings of both political awareness and the idea that I might integrate intellectual work with my own experience. But studies largely remained a necessary, if sometimes interesting, evil.

I was lukewarm about graduate school. I wanted a chance to do something different, to test myself, to see the world, to do something useful. The military in 1963 did not yet carry the ideological loading it acquired during the War in Vietnam, but it offered limited opportunities for someone with my interests and poor eyesight.

Luckily, the Kennedy Administration launched an alternative choice just before I graduated. I joined the Peace Corps and went to Ethiopia as a community organizer in September, 1963, after ten weeks of training at UCLA.

Going to Ethiopia was another world-change, and one that made the transition from Bangor to Milton seem pale by comparison. I spent two years in Ethiopia, in a provincial town that was a far cry from Cambridge. I worked with Ethiopian counterparts and other Volunteers to start a community center, organize a school lunch program, mobilize farmers to protect water supplies, and launch a small farmers' marketing cooperative. I learned enough Amharic to become a frequent guest at wedding celebrations of local farmer families.

I liked living and working in Ethiopia, but I was frustrated by my inability to provide assistance of real consequence on major problems. Our marketing cooperative eventually collapsed for lack of resources to fight the middlemen who exploited the farmers. There didn't seem to be anything we could do about it. I could return to the U.S., but my farmer were stuck in a no-win situation.

When I returned to the U.S., I brought with me an abiding sense of the commonalities that link people from vastly different backgrounds, an awareness of how badly the economic and political decks are often stacked against those born outside elite groups (within or among nations), and an interest in gaining knowledge and skills for further work on development problems.

II. Finding the Field

So I went back to school. Several Peace Corps staff suggested law school as good general education and preparation for work on social development issues. I entered Yale

Law School two weeks after arriving back in the U.S.

I hated it. The courses were irrelevant to my immediate interests: Federal Procedure and Torts when people are starving by the millions? I resented the adversarial climate and socialization process of the Law School, and I rejected the "gun for hire" concept of the lawyer's role. I treated Law School as another test, and refused to be "driven out," but I withdrew in spirit (and as often as feasible in body). I did poorly on exams, so my alienation from the substance was compounded by poor performance and threats to my self-esteem. I was miserable.

I took courses in other departments as therapy. In the Spring of my second year I took a course in Organizational Behavior, and was smitten. The next Fall I enrolled in a four-year program that offered an M.A. in OB as well as the law degree. The OB Program was intensely stimulating and liberating. It was heady time for the field: the "Human Potential Movement," in the form of widespread enthusiasm for "encounter groups" and "personal growth laboratories," was in full swing. Faculty and students in the OB Department had ambitious dreams for creating a better world. The change from the Law School was dramatic -- another change of worlds, accomplished by walking two blocks.

I was fascinated by interpersonal relations and group dynamics, and I found courses and faculty breaking new ground in many arenas. Essentially I woke up intellectually through work with people like Chris Argyris, Clay Alderfer and Tim Hall in Organizational Behavior, Herb Shepard and Al Fitz in Public Health, Ted Mills in Sociology, and Boris Astrachan in Psychiatry. After six months I transferred from the M.A. to the Ph.D. Program in Organizational Behavior, after about twenty minutes of worrying about the financial and occupational implications of abandoning a legal career.

In the second semester of my work in Organizational Behavior I met Jane Covey, a graduate student in psychiatric nursing, in a course on group dynamics. By the end of the course we were living together. During the next two years we took courses, trained in laboratory education groups, and worked together as organizational consultants. We were married in the Spring of 1969.

I suggested earlier that four themes -- concern with social development and social justice, combining action and research, work at the interface of multiple worlds, and multiple levels of analysis -- have characterized my work. Two projects in graduate school, both with educational institutions, had an important impact in shaping my research identity and giving initial expression to these themes. I was a researcher-consultant to Yale Upward Bound, a residential summer education program for students from the New Haven School System, and I wrote my dissertation on an organization development effort with the "Gaight School."

In the Spring and Summer of 1968 I worked with the Upward Bound Program directed by Bill Torbert, a fellow doctoral student. The Program brought together academically talented but "socially disadvantaged" students in an enriching summer program followed by support during the school year designed to help participants prepare for college. I consulted to the staff as they planned the Program, and acted as a resident consultant and liaison to the participants' parents during the Program itself.

The Program has been described in detail elsewhere (e.g., Torbert, 1976). It sought to build a democratic community among Program staff and teenagers from urban poverty areas, eighty percent of them black. It was emotionally-charged, politically

polarized, institutionally creative, and often completely chaotic. My experience had not prepared me for the realities of urban poverty, black or white. I was ready to be participative and responsive; I was not ready to be a white authority in a system challenged and sometimes dominated by street norms.

For example, on the second night of the Program a gang of black students appeared outside my door chanting "Get Brown!" I decided (reluctantly) to unlock my door and confront the mob in my pajamas; they then decided to "get" someone else. I spent much of the night thinking about how to respond to physical challenges, commonplace to most Program participants but a rarity to me. When a group of five students later asked me what I would do if they attacked me, I could say "You'd win, but not without some of you getting hurt."

Tensions rose as the Program continued. Some tensions were internal, as students and staff struggled to negotiate shared norms and expectations. Other tensions were imported. Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy had been assassinated in the Spring of 1968 and black communities in many cities erupted in riots that summer. As tensions escalated, I was drawn out of my non-directive researcher-consultant role into formulating, advocating and implementing decisions about program management -- often in crises. At one point I even called for support from the New Haven police, an egregious violation of Program norms that I thought necessary to protect the physical safety of a staff member.

We finally ended the Program two weeks early, as it became increasingly difficult to control internal tensions and external invasions enough to protect students and staff. By that time I was highly sensitized to threats of violence and retaliation; when Jane, my spouse-to-be, visited from another city. I immediately spirited her away so threats against her could not be used as a weapon against me as had already happened with other staff.

In several ways the Upward Bound Project foreshadows the major themes of my work. Problems of social change, social justice and relations between unequal groups were at the heart of the Upward Bound Program. I also found myself operating at the interfaces among very diverse groups -- blacks and whites; students, teachers and parents; Yale students and ghetto residents. To a lesser extent the Program posed questions of integrating action and research and dealing with multiple levels of analysis. The experience highlighted the challenges of playing multiple roles in such projects. I was a consultant, a researcher, an activist, and a manager at Upward Bound -- often all simultaneously. I found that at Upward Bound it was unrealistic to stay in the role suggested by my research training if I were committed to action as well as research.

The contrasting project at the Gaight School began six months later. The School was a private boys' boarding school that provided high-quality secondary education to sons of the social and economic elite. I wrote my dissertation (Brown, 1971) and subsequently co-authored a book with Clay Alderfer, my dissertation adviser, about this project (Alderfer and Brown, 1975).

The project began with a week-long laboratory training workshop for the senior class, carried out by a team of Yale faculty and graduate students. That event led to an organizational diagnosis that Clay and I carried out over the next year. We interviewed administrators, faculty and students, administered several questionnaires, and participated in a variety of meetings and other school activities, and fed back preliminary findings in the Spring.

The diagnosis turned out to have unexpected personal imports. As I interviewed Gaight students, I found myself identifying strongly with difficulty in adjusting to school life. With Clay's help I realized I was reliving my experience at Milton. I was sensitive to the impacts of sarcasm on students because I had clear memories of my own adolescent experience of constant verbal dueling. Clay and I found that we could use our different school experiences -- he had attended a public high school -- to get a richer perspective on Gaight than either of us could have developed alone.

We also found that our positions as graduate student and faculty adviser influenced our roles in the diagnostic process. I was inclined to identify with students; Clay tended to identify more with administrators. These differences could have undermined our work with the organization, but Clay encouraged discussion of our different perspectives and we are in fact almost the same age, so we were able to make constructive use of our different experiences at Gaight.

Our diagnosis focused on the impacts of life at Gaight on students, and the data suggested that experience of living at the school had negative effects over time on student morale, satisfaction, and learning. Students and faculty alike were trapped in a "total institution," whose competitive culture was stressful for everyone. We expected that our diagnosis would receive mixed reviews from different constituencies in the school. We were not disappointed.

The Headmaster and key administrators were shocked but prepared to accept the findings. They confirmed concerns that prompted the Headmaster to initiate the diagnosis in the first place. Many faculty denied the validity of the data, attacked the analysis and its conclusions, and questioned the motives of the researcher-consultants. Some students characterized the findings as "accurate but an inevitable part of life," and were surprised that we were concerned; others agreed that the findings identified serious problems; still others were skeptical about the whole business.

The most positive and energetic responses came from freshmen, the most victimized and least socialized members of the community. They began the discussion with skepticism, but quickly moved on to active analysis of school problems. They later decided as a class to abandon the traditional practice of hazing freshmen. Key members of this class made essential contributions to major changes in school climate and student experience over the next three years of their school careers.

Gaight School and Yale Upward Bound represent very different worlds. There were problems of conflict between unequally powerful groups in both organizations, but the problems of poverty, racism and social justice that were at the core of the Upward Bound Program were peripheral at Gaight. Gaight invoked my experience at Milton, while the idealism and chaos of Upward Bound were reminiscent of my experience in Ethiopia. In both cases the prevailing models of interpersonal and organizational development provided by my graduate training were of limited use.

Both experiences drew attention to the importance of multiple levels of analysis for understanding complex systems. I was equipped to understand group dynamics and interpersonal relations, but in both projects I needed to understand organizational and wider social forces to explain the problems we encountered.

Yale Upward Bound demanded more capacity for operating in multiple worlds -- black and white students, black and white parents, Yale students and faculty, gangs from

New Haven. But even in the Gaight project we found ourselves at conflicted interfaces among faculty, administration, and students.

I was more involved in combining action with research at Gaight than at Upward Bound, since my dissertation turned on the former project. But I was able to explore the researcher-consultant role in both. At Upward Bound I was sucked out of the researcher-consultant role to become a Program authority. At Gaight both personal predisposition and institutional role positioned me to challenge school authorities in the interest of students. In both cases I found it difficult to remain a "non-aligned" researcher-consultant, though experience as an authority at Upward Bound helped me empathize with Gaight faculty and administrators. In practicing action research, I found it difficult to preserve the neutral, technical, non-directive role described for researcher-consultants in my graduate school classes.

But the two experiences provided a rich basis for thought about the dynamics of organization and planned change. Upward Bound and Gaight were both educational organizations, but there the similarities ended. Rules, norms and expectations at Upward Bound were vague, nonexistent, or negotiable. The program's external boundaries were highly permeable; students left and returned at whim, and outsiders often arrived uninvited and in force. This lack of organization hampered constructive use of energy and eventually undermined the survival of the Program. Students at Gaight, in contrast, were hedged in by a maze of formal and informal expectations and rules backed by strong institutional and informal sanctions. Information from and access to the outside world was tightly controlled. The decline of student morale and energy in part could be attributed to excessive regulation and confinement in the closed system. The seeds of work on the concept of "under-" and "over-organization" were planted in these experiences, even though I did not start writing on the topic for another decade (Brown, 1980; 1983b; see also Alderfer 1976, 1979).

More importantly, the contrast between Gaight and Upward Bound illustrated in stark terms what might be expected from different professional choices. Work with elite organizations like Gaight would offer chances to work with people of similar background, in systems with substantial resources, under circumstances where positive impacts were likely and visible in the upper reaches of society. Work with organizations like Upward Bound, in contrast, would involve work with colleagues very different from me, in situations of scarce resources, under circumstances of disorganization, conflict, and even physical danger, where positive outcomes and wide impacts were considerably less likely. In retrospect it seems clear that Gaight-like situations offered better opportunities for rigorous research, for effective consultation, and even for long term social influence. But I was more engaged, stimulated, and mobilized by the experience with Upward Bound.

III. Learning the Game

After completing the Ph.D., I took a job as an assistant professor at Case Western Reserve University. Although I was skeptical about a research career, the Yale program assumed that its graduates would want junior faculty positions and accorded little legitimacy or access to other possibilities. I had been sufficiently socialized to opt for three or four years as an assistant professor to "see if I liked writing and research" in spite of my

skepticism.

Case was a good place for me to explore being a researcher-consultant. The Department of Organizational Behavior encouraged combining action and research. I received a lot of support from Case faculty and worked on joint research, consultation and writing projects with faculty colleagues like Frank Friedlander, Bob Kaplan, Suresh Srivastva, and John Aram. I also worked closely with Case doctoral students, many of whom shared my concerns with social change and development issues. I collaborated on sustained research and writing projects with students like David Bachner, Rajesh Tandon, Barbara Gray, and Lynda Detterman, and I learned from countless others.

We expanded our family in Cleveland. Jane worked initially for the Cleveland Public Health Department and later taught nursing at St. Johns College. We bought a house. Our daughter Rachel arrived in 1972, and our son Nathan was born twenty months later. Two years after that we moved from our suburban house into an apartment condominium, and Jane returned to graduate school at Case for a MBA.

Over eight years at Case I worked on a variety of projects, ranging from work with a consortium of educational institutions (e.g., Brown, Aram and Bachner, 1974) to eight years of organization development consultation and research with several chemical plants (see Brown and Kaplan, 1981). In retrospect, however, two projects started in the Seventies were particularly influential in shaping my future work: a series of dialogues between corporate CEOs and young community activists, and a program designed to build leadership networks across occupational, ethnic and class differences in a metropolitan area.

The Seventies was a decade of considerable national and international turbulence. The Vietnam War waxed and waned; OPEC rose and oil prices with it; Nixon met his Watergate; and the faith of the American people in their leadership reached a new low. Cleveland became a national symbol of sorts when the polluted Cuyahoga River caught fire. The city suffered from advanced urban blight and racial tensions. After riots in the black ghettos in the late Sixties, the black community achieved sufficient political clout to elect a black mayor. In the early Seventies I was invited to facilitate a series of CEO-Activist Dialogues funded by a national foundation to catalyze projects that would make use of the energy of the activists and the skills and organizational leverage of the CEOs.

Unfortunately (some might say predictably) the first Dialogue produced more power struggle than collaboration. After a promising start, discussions of projects produced escalating tension. A project proposed by the CEOs was scrapped when the activists walked out to caucus by themselves. The walkout placed me in a classic bind, struggling to preserve relations with both sides. I found myself in the hall between the meeting places of the two parties, oscillating back and forth. I was unwilling to commit to joining either, but very self-critical about my inability to decide. When the activists made a counter-proposal, the CEOs grumpily acceded. But neither group invested the time and energy required to make that project succeed in the weeks following the Dialogue.

I was disappointed by the failure of the Dialogue, and I puzzled about how that Failure could be understood. Eventually I reconceptualized the conflict as rooted in the combination of intergroup tensions and power differences -- the tensions among activists of different ethnic backgrounds as well as the struggle between street activists and corporate presidents. When I was invited to facilitate a second Dialogue, I took the

opportunity to test the theory by interventions before and during the dialogue to prevent the same dynamics (see Brown, 1977).

The second Dialogue produced conflict but also consensus; participants learned from each other; several problem-solving partnerships negotiated at the meeting continued to operate for several years. I was delighted (and a bit startled) to see my theory pay off in practical terms.

The Dialogues were an ideal field for pursuing my growing interest in power, conflict and social change. Differences in culture and power provided an explosive mixture in the Dialogues, and the facilitator role required operating at the interface among many diverse parties. I discovered that empowering one group (e.g., the activists in the first Dialogue) at the expense of another (e.g., the CEOs) does not always improve the situation. The seesawing domination of the first Dialogue, first by CEOs and then by activists, ended in withdrawal rather than mutual empowerment. I learned that it is sometimes (probably often) necessary to empower both low- and high-power groups to promote, long-term cooperation. Although I had been interested in conflict since graduate school, after the Dialogues I began a more systematic reading and writing about power differences and their impact on intergroup relations (e.g., Brown, 1978; 1983a)

The Dialogues also validated for me the Lewinian idea that "nothing is as practical as a good theory." I believed that I understood the dynamics that scuttled the first Dialogue, but even so I was astonished to see how well the theory-driven changes in the second Dialogue worked. That success confirmed that both practice and theory could benefit from combining action and research. I also found that the Dialogues inspired significantly more thought and effort than other projects less central to my interests and values.

The residual glow from the Dialogue experience helped to involve me in a similar experience several years later. I was invited to help design a program to expand the existing network of leaders active in solving the problems of a large metropolitan area. Approximately fifty leaders from business, labor, media, education, government, and community organizations were invited to participate in the Program, beginning with a two-day retreat and followed by monthly day-long meetings for a year. A new "class" would be recruited each year. The Program was designed to build better understanding of critical city-wide issues (e.g., economic development, race relations, crime and public order, education) and to introduce leaders from different sectors, races, and genders to one another.

I had mixed feelings at the outset. I feared the Program would become a "white businessmen's club," but I was intrigued by the opportunity to open up leadership networks to otherwise excluded groups and organizations. Over the next two years, I helped staff and participant committees design activities, facilitated retreats, and collected data about contacts among members before and during the Program. The Program brought together people from very diverse backgrounds, and frank discussion of differences was not easy. Participants were wary of overt conflict, but also energized and excited by opportunities to learn about each other's views and differences when they had overcome the initial reserve.

Three years after the Program began, I accepted an invitation to evaluate its impacts. I composed an evaluation team that would mirror the diversity of the Program by recruiting Lynda Detterman, a white woman, and Alvin Butler, a black man, to work with me. The team quickly began to mirror the dynamics of the Program as well: I became very

positive in response to the enthusiasm of white male participants; Lynda and Alvin reflected the skepticism of women and blacks (See Alderfer, et al., in preparation). Analysis of quantitative indicators confirmed that different groups had quite different evaluations of the Program, and that dealing directly with controversial issues was associated with continuing contact across racial differences. Program managers used these findings to redesign the Program for more direct examination of controversial issues like crime and race.

We collected vast amounts of data about networks among Program participants over the four years of this project. The complexities of data analysis and personal histories of the research team (job changes, geographical moves), however, prolonged the gap between research conception and publication to a decade (Brown and Detterman, 1987) -- a particularly extreme example of a problem perennial to action research projects.

The Leadership Program illustrates again the themes of social change and social problem-solving and work with many diverse groups. It also illustrates my gradual shift of interest from interpersonal and group phenomena at (Upward Bound) to organizational problems (at Gaight) to community projects (in the Dialogues) to building city-wide leadership networks. Each of these projects involves problems at several levels of analysis, but the focus moves toward large scale interventions and problems.

I was quite struck by the possibilities in the Leadership Program for promoting large-scale change with relatively small-scale interventions. Network concepts offer a way to integrate micro- and macro-analyses of community dynamics, and research has shown informal networks are important to community decision-making (e.g., Laumann, Galaskiewicz and Marsden, 1978). Our analysis suggested that the Leadership Program "fertilized" the city for the growth of new networks among leaders who had not previously known each other. I came to believe from this and other experiences that theory and practice from organization change management can be combined with analysis of larger social systems for catalyzing large scale social change.

IV. Expanding the League

In 1979 Jane, Rachel, Nathan and I went to India for me to spend a sabbatical year as a Fulbright Visiting Lecturer at the Public Enterprises Centre for Continuing Education (PECCE) in New Delhi. Rachel and Nathan were seven and five; Jane had just finished her MBA. We went to PECCE because I was eager to test ideas and skills developed in the fifteen years since Ethiopia for relevance to problems of development, and also because our friend Rajesh Tandon was there. The move from a School of Management in Cleveland to a center for development studies in New Delhi amounted to another change of worlds, of course -- a change that has again had major consequences.

At PECCE I did research and consulting with a variety of agencies that were promoting social and economic development, including public enterprises, trade unions, and voluntary development organizations involved in grassroots organization and self-help projects. I worked with teams of PECCE staff to assist public enterprises, responsible for much of India's industrial development, on problems of organizational conflict and change. I also carried out field studies of the roles some public enterprises play in village organization and development (see Brown, Mani, and Vijayendra, 1981).

I also thought a lot about what I was doing and where I was going. Being at PECCE was a new experience in many ways, political as well as cultural and professional. My reservations about the social and political consequences of market capitalism marked me as a maverick at the School of Management; my reservations about the consequences of centralized socialism made me a maverick at PECCE. But I was impressed with the competence and commitment of my PECCE colleagues. I was even more impressed with the heroism of people who forsook elite educations and social positions to work with the poor and oppressed as leaders of voluntary organizations, trade unions, and some government agencies. Their examples made me wonder about what kind of contributions my own work was making, and to whom.

I worked during the sabbatical to complete a book on conflict and several papers on research in collaboration with consulting clients (see Brown and Kaplan, 1981). But some of my earlier interests were greatly affected by the Indian context. My interest in power and conflict expanded to include implications for social change in a larger sense, and my work on action research expanded to include the "participatory research" tradition.

In India I was confronted on a daily basis with extreme difference in social, economic, and political power. I read regular newspaper reports of lower caste villagers being shot or burned for asking for the minimum wage, and I talked with community and union leaders about the risks and consequences of organizing oppressed groups to gain political voice. I became increasingly aware of the linkage between power distributions and peoples' awareness of their own interests. I was particularly struck with Paolo Freire's use of adult education and literacy training to "conscientize" the poor and oppressed (Freire, 1972), and by Steven Lukes' analysis of how the oppressed can become accomplices in the violation of their own interests (Lukes, 1974). I tried to integrate some of these ideas into my understanding of unequal conflict and to explore their implications for constructive intervention (Brown, 1983a; 1983b).

I also learned from Rajesh about participatory research, an offshoot of action research in part inspired by Freire's work. Participatory researchers stress working with and for oppressed groups, and criticize more traditional social research methods for their (often unwitting) biases that favor the rich and powerful. Participatory research is used to help poor and powerless groups understand their situations, recognize the validity of their knowledge, and empower themselves for self-help and self-reliance. It stresses the importance of researcher awareness of their own values, ideologies, and political and economic interests in the social systems in which they collect data to intervene. Rajesh and I jointly wrote several papers about participatory research (Tandon and Brown, 1981; Brown and Tandon, 1983).

My interest in development work, my enduring concerns about social change and social justice, and my questions about what I should do with my life were brought into sharp focus by a family crisis. Jane and I agreed before coming to India that her being there was contingent on finding her meaningful work. After four months of searching it became clear that the opportunities for her were severely limited. We decided she and the children would return to the U.S. after Christmas, so she could start work that would make use of her new MBA.

But return to where in the U.S.? I had tenure at Case and Jane had lots of professional contacts in Cleveland. But Case was not a good setting for pursuing interests

in development studies, and we expected to stay anywhere Jane took a job for at least four or five years.

We decided to move to Boston. It was a difficult decision. We liked our friends and colleagues in Cleveland; I was anxious about abandoning tenure; Boston was an unknown and highly competitive job market for Jane; neither of us wanted to be separated for six months. But it seemed the best alternative. Jane and the children returned to Boston in January. By the time I arrived in June, Jane was working for a small but rapidly growing organizational consulting firm in Cambridge.

During the next year I finished my book on conflict (Brown, 1983b), did some freelance consulting, was the "parent-at-home" to Rachel and Nathan, and explored the possibilities in Boston for work on social and economic development issues. I found that it was not easy to make the jump from academic organizational behavior and organization development to work on the institutional and organizational aspects of development, in part because organization problems were not widely recognized as an important development issue.

But gradually possibilities appeared. A colleague invited me to take over the corporate shell of a nonprofit organization founded in the Sixties but inactive for the last five years. I became President of the Institute for Development Research (IDR) in 1980. The first project I took under the IDR banner was the evaluation of the Urban Leadership Program described earlier. I also discovered that Boston University had a well-regarded program on public enterprises in developing countries, so Boston University was one of the few places in the United States where my experience with PECCE was a desirable credential. Boston University also had a School of Management with a growing department of Organizational Behavior.

In the Fall of 1981 I accepted a visiting position at Boston University, one-third time in the Public Enterprise Program and two-thirds in Organizational Behavior. I began research and consulting projects on public enterprises in developing countries for the World Bank and teaching in public enterprise workshops at the Harvard Institute for International Development the same year.

I was asked to stay on as Chairperson of Organizational Behavior in 1982. Over the next five years I combined administrative responsibilities and teaching at Boston University with research and consulting at IDR on institutional arrangements for improving the performance of public enterprises, managing change in government ministries concerned with promoting development, and organizing and managing voluntary organizations involved in empowering grassroots groups.

Work with public enterprises and government ministries was an important source of learning about the problems of development and access to development agencies. But, gradually the work with voluntary development agencies has become primary for me. In 1983, Jane joined me at IDR, initially part-time and later full-time as Executive Director.

We launched an action-research program on voluntary development organizations working in the United States and in the Third World. We used a few seed grants and liberal doses of volunteer time to do four case studies of empowerment-oriented agencies.

Those cases provided the basis for developing ideas about the strategy, organization, and management dilemmas of such organizations (Brown and Brown, 1983; Brown and Covey, 1987; 1989; in preparation).

This work has been challenging intellectually and personally. The staffs of voluntary development agencies are sensitive to questions of values and ideologies, and intolerant of ideological differences. One chief executive remarked to us on the way to meet his staff, "Many of my colleagues think that all consultants are parasites. You might get questions like that." It was a good prediction. Agencies organized around values and ideologies often test outsiders more on ideological grounds than on technical competence or professional qualifications. For the same reason, these organizations are subject to internal "holy wars," into which outsiders step at considerable peril. Working with voluntary development organizations has forced me to become clearer about my own values and ideologies, especially with respect to social change.

Many voluntary development agencies are "bridging institutions," that use resources from wealthy donors to work with the very poor. Their missions require that they work with very diverse constituencies and articulate visions that are compelling to a wide variety of supporters. The agencies we studied had difficulties in managing strategically and in handling internal tensions. These problems were often related to the combination of diverse constituencies and ideological differences. Much of our analysis has focused on conflict and decision-making within these agencies and their strategic roles in social change outside their boundaries.

More by good luck than planning, this research has been timely. Interest in voluntary development organizations as catalysts of development has been rising, especially as the failure of government agencies to promote grassroots development has become obvious. IDR has become part of an international network of agencies involved in strengthening the voluntary development sector, especially in developing countries. David Korten, a seminal researcher-consultant in development organization and strategy, has joined us to work on strategies for voluntary organizations and sectors. Other colleagues have become involved in a variety of IDR projects to learn about and strengthen the role of the voluntary sector in development.

I am still concerned with social change and social justice. I am still working at the interfaces between many different groups, often characterized by gross differences in wealth and power. I am still trying to combine action and research to create ideas that will transform social theory and social practice.

Perhaps the biggest shift in the way I approach organizations and organizational research has been in the level of analysis at which I focus. I was interested as a graduate student in interpersonal and group dynamics, and I focused as a young faculty member on intergroup and organizational issues. Today I am concerned with problems of interorganizational relations and the role of the voluntary sector in changes at the societal level. I am most interested in understanding and assisting organizations that play a strategic role in large-scale social change and development.

It can be argued that I have basically left the field of organizational behavior as ordinarily conceived and practiced. Certainly I do not focus on organizational problems that are independent of larger social issues anymore. But I prefer to think of my work as trying to "expand the league" of both organizational behavior and development studies to include each other's perspectives and tools. I am convinced that organizational theorists have much to learn from economics, political science, anthropology and other fields concerned with social change and development, and that development studies has much to

learn from organization theory and practice.

V. Reflection

As suggested at the outset, several themes recur in my work. I want here to review those themes and speculate about their sources. I will also reflect on recurrent patterns of behavior that underpin my evolution as a scholar and a practitioner.

Concern with social justice and the abuse of power has shaped much of my work. The foundations for this concern were laid, I think, by the value my parents placed on fairness, equality of opportunity, and the importance of using power responsibly. I think experience with being bullied as a child encouraged empathy for the less powerful and visceral rejection of actions I conceive to be abuses of power. Over the years I have had more opportunities than most people from my economic and social background to encounter poverty and oppression in settings that encouraged me to identify with rather than blame the victims. I have also been fortunate in my family and professional life to have the "psychological space" and active encouragement and support to pursue the work I found meaningful. For others less blessed, survival demands can preempt such pursuits.

I have worked and lived at the interface of different worlds for most of my life. I became aware of the multiplicity of worlds as I lived in Milton and Bangor; this awareness was deepened by experiences in Cambridge and Ethiopia, Yale Upward Bound and Gaight Schools. I think I am personally most comfortable outside or at the edge of social groups, in an accepted but relatively autonomous role. I learned to be a maverick early, but I like to be a maverick with influence. The taste for living in different worlds I developed as a teenager continues to influence the work I do and where I do it. If I am going to be central to any organization, probably a "bridging institution" like IDR is an appropriate choice.

I have remained surprisingly faithful to the struggle to combine action and research over the years. I used the term "research action" in the title of a paper about my dissertation almost twenty years ago, and it remains an apt description for much of my work today. Action research offers me opportunities for academic theory-building, chances to make a practical difference on important problems, and the potential for creative exchange between research and action worlds. I am stimulated by both academics and practitioners, by policy-makers and those affected by policies. Many of the most exciting and edifying (and also frustrating) moments in my professional experience have emerged from collisions between elegant theories and messy social realities.

The theme of multiple levels of analysis has pervaded much of my work, and I have gradually supplemented micro-perspectives with more macro-analysis over the years. My graduate training in Organizational Behavior was heavily influenced by social psychology, but over the years I have poached on the preserves of sociologists, political scientists, and even development economists for leverage on development problems. In part, this evolution in perspective has been driven by my concern with practice outcomes: too often the impacts of micro-level interventions have been aborted by unforeseen macro-level forces. I have come to believe that we need to understand multiple levels and multiple aspects of social problems if we are to solve them successfully.

As I have reflected about how these themes have shaped and been shaped by my

evolution as a researcher-consultant, I have become aware of several recurring patterns. In general my experience makes more sense in retrospect than it did at the time. I have not often been conscious of any overall plan or clear sequence of steps; I have experienced lots of confusion and questions about where to go and what to do. I believe that many events in my work and life have been a matter of luck or accident. But I am also aware of several occasions on which I explicitly made choices to step off the obvious path, and do something that others thought odd or worse. Examples include going into the Peace Corps, leaving law for organization behavior, resigning tenure at Case to be unemployed in Boston. I have come to think of these events as "detours" from the obvious career paths stretching before me. Frequently these detours have become the main road for me. There are obvious costs to such detours. Other choices might have made me richer, more influential, more famous, more productive, and so on. But I like what I am doing, even though the path has involved a lot of wandering through uncharted territory.

I have been strongly influenced by the institutional bases from which I have done my work, but I have learned to preserve a kind of self-and-institutional balance between my needs and organizational demands. I am by preference an organizational "good citizen," who feels some obligation to support the institutions that shelter me. But I can also be an organizational maverick. Case Western Reserve University provided a close community of colleagues and considerable support, but I left when it became clear that my interests were really not consistent with the school's priorities. I have struggled to balance the demands of administration, teaching, research, and consulting at Boston University and IDR, and have felt fairly successful in serving their diverse interests. But maintaining these institutional balances is not always easy or simple.

Finally, I have been blessed with continuing support, especially in crises, from a web of family, friends and colleagues. Jane has been my closest colleague for more than twenty years. She participated in the work at Gaight School; she helped me reconceptualize the events in the first CEO-Activist Dialogue; she convinced me we should undertake the studies of voluntary development organizations; she has led the exploration of some "detours" and supported my ditherings about whether to try others. Finding the field of OB was greatly influenced by faculty and graduate students at Yale, and faculty and graduate students at Case helped me learn the researcher-consultant game. The transition to development studies in Boston via India was very challenging: more people were involved; the stakes were higher; the alternatives were more ambiguous. We depended on many people to make it work, from family and friends who supported Jane as a lone parent in a new community, to professional colleagues who referred clients and offered me faculty positions, to colleagues in developing countries who included me in development projects. We little knew how much we would need support when we started that transition; still less did we know how much would be offered. Few of the choices or "detours" that have defined my professional life would have been possible without this kind of support.

Does my experience have more general implications? I expect that others who seek to combine action and research will be stimulated by the challenge of meeting the different standards of academics and practitioners. I expect that others who try to span the chasms between many social worlds -- rich and poor, powerful and powerless, North and South -- will struggle to create unifying visions and concepts and sometimes find themselves

understood and accepted in none.

But I believe there are also significant rewards for those who are willing to combine research and action and bridge multiple worlds. Such boundary-crossers can play a seminal role in a world of increasing organizational and global interdependence. Growing interdependence makes inevitable the collision of perspectives from disparate worlds. Out of that confrontation may come polarization and rigidified boundaries, or the creation of new visions and concepts that define a better future. We inhabit many social worlds, but we live in just one physical and ecological world -- and that one world is shrinking rapidly. Inquiry and action enable creative integration of ideas from our many social worlds can play a central role in creating those new visions and concepts.

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