

The Seeds of XLCHC

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I. Origin of the System: 1978-1987

The raison d'être of LCHC: how does culturally organized experience influence the development of human beings? According to my understanding of the methodological requirements for addressing this problem, cross-cultural research will be most powerful when well educated, highly motivated "natives" of different groups cooperate in comparative research under conditions of equality.

-Interim Carnegie Report

By 1984, two years into the Reagan-Bush era, we had lost virtually all of our minority group faculty, our research concerns were explicitly rejected by federal funding agencies, and were denied post-doctoral funds on the grounds that there was insufficient minority group faculty

-XLCHC Welcome Document

Structurally, electronic networks remove several of the obvious avenues for prejudice. Since the electronic message medium is currently restricted to text, the visual cues to race, [sex], gender, and age are absent.

-PS23 1/2/84

The Seeds of XLCHC Development

The Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (LCHC), as it was founded in 1971, is a program of research and training in cultural psychology. As such, one key function of LCHC is to act as a center for information exchange and cooperation across institutional barriers. As early as 1984, the information exchange program divided itself along the following lines: 1) Networking among institutionally separate groups, 2) Selected cross-national cooperation, and 3) Publication through the LCHC Newsletter (*Carnegie*, p. 41). Set against a backdrop of intra-office, intra-university, and inter-academic computer networking, XLCHC (the Extended Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition) emerged as a natural extension of LCHC and its goals of mutual

collaboration. XLCHC evolved to meet the challenges that LCHC was facing.

Computer access allows XLCHC to transcend the barrier of geographic space to allow communication between institutionally separate and culturally diverse groups. The term "extended" serves as a reference to increased access by both new and old members of LCHC, the physical laboratory. "In the summer of 1983 we initiated XLCHC, a satellite-based message system through which various research groups which have been affiliated with LCHC in the past and share an interest in one or more of its on-going research projects could interact over problems of mutual interest" (*Carnegie*, p. 36). LCHC was already an existing and influential network of academics as described by a fellow:

The network provides tangible support for the growth that comes through keeping in touch with Lab scholars and others...It seems to me that much of the extraordinary influence that the lab has had over the years comes from the intense commitment to mutual-help; to a fluid shifting set of roles to which very little attention is given to the formal disciplinary and status concerns that impede education in general and interdisciplinary work in general (*Carnegie*, p. 32).

XLCHC formalizes this network by allowing perpetual and asynchronous participation by members regardless of ethnicity, location, or position. In the summer of 1983, an experiment connects school children in southern California and Fairbanks, Alaska via electronic messaging, UCSD and the University of Alaska.

Associated with LCHC, the Scollon connection illustrates the dual function of the evolving XLCHC. Scollon, a visitor to LCHC, returns to the University of Alaska where he conducts research on the use of micro-processors in education, thereby broadening the research base of a now expanding LCHC. Scollon's research foreshadows the

pending XLCHC culture:

Electronic mail systems are set up within universities, businesses, and governmental agencies on the assumption that it is *chronos* [clock governed time] governing their operation. They are valued for their speed and efficiency of operation. It is often the case, however, that these message systems become the culture for the growth of complex networks of highly informal *kairos* [geared to appropriateness]-timed communication both within the institutions and others who have somehow gained access (QNLCHC, July 1983, Vol.5, #3).

Time and space limitations transcended, the network is allowed to expand in other directions, evolving new properties and forms of interaction geared toward the needs of XLCHC participants. The success of this project is a pre-eminent example of this non-local type of cooperation, proving that coordinated education through microprocessors is not only possible in theory, but feasible in practice.

Changes in lab composition cement the need for extended non-local LCHC communication. A series of pernicious funding setbacks and ideological shifts undermine the lab's commitment to cultural diversity. The psychology department's decision to terminate a permanent Black colleague greatly undermines the program. "Although [Alonzo] Anderson stayed on to do excellent research, his lack of access to graduate students and the total lack of leadership for minority students in the department cut away from one element of our program" (*Carnegie*, p.39). The lab gets caught in a vicious circle. They are unable to obtain funding for multi-cultural projects without diversity and unable to obtain diversity without funding:

The net effect of these changes was to undermine the principle of division of authority which had underpinned LCHC since its founding. Minority group research faculty continued to analyze data and write, but they could no longer conduct field research which provided a training context for fellows. Only grant proposals that de-emphasized social factors in favor