

WORKING DRAFT

BORDER WORK IN THE FIFTH DIMENSION

“One must not imagine the realm of culture as some sort of spatial whole, having boundaries but also having internal territory. The realm of culture has no internal territory: it is entirely distributed along the boundaries, boundaries pass everywhere, through its every aspect. Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries: in this is its seriousness and significance. Abstracted from boundaries it loses its soil, it becomes empty, arrogant, it degenerates and dies.” (Bakhtin, 1981)

Thinking in terms of class and ethnicity today requires that we renounce customary generalizations and recognize the intrinsic specificity of social contexts. Unlike the classic view that depicts class, ethnicity, race, gender, age and sexual orientation as self-contained concepts made up of cohesive patterns, social life today is seen more as a permeable array of intersections where distinct processes deriving from class, ethnicity and such interweave. We negotiate this labyrinth using the maps our culture gives us, accounts of the past successes of our predecessors that we must adapt to today’s world in order to manage our own experiences and daily encounters.

The maps our undergraduates bring with them to UCSD are numerous and diverse but they all have one thing in common, they are not of this place, nor are they of the places these young people are bound for. The logic that held true in their parents’ and teachers’ lives often flounders in our faster-paced hybrid world – a world that is constantly and repeatedly being recreated at the points of contact between diverse and often conflicting lifestyles and worldviews. During their years at UCSD our students are forced to re-examine their histories and redefine their values in an attempt to establish constant ethical guideposts for a changing world. Our challenge does not lie in the quantity of information we must impart to them, but in our capacity to offer our students suitable spaces and appropriate tools for critical analysis of personal cultural inheritance, for recognition of cultural differences, and for cultivating respect for the values and identities of others.

In traditional societies teaching was accomplished as a community practice where apprentices learned not only the skills required to take part in socially sanctioned activities, but also the values, ethics, goals and responsibilities associated with those activities. Since this learning took place in the constantly evolving and adapting ‘real world’ - midstream one might say, there existed a natural connection between the ethical and practical components of the tasks at hand. The lessons learned were never severed from the social practices in which their eventual performance would be embedded.

A quite different model of education has developed in contemporary Western societies, one that has reduced teaching and learning to the transmission of information. Giuseppe Mantovani observes that this model has the advantage of sidestepping the moral dimension of education, which is increasingly difficult to manage in societies where disparate and conflicting cultures coexist. This convenient solution, Mantovani tells us, gains support from cognitive psychology and from the advent of the personal computer. Together these forces have managed to eclipse the classic understanding of knowledge as *“a personal adventure rooted in tradition”* and forward the belief that human knowledge equates to simple information acquisition and processing (Montavani, G. 2000, p.3).

Colleges and universities take a departmental approach to knowledge resulting in highly specialized graduates who often exercise their competence in hermetic shells with little understanding of how their work fits within the larger social context (Mantovani). We have come to assign considerable weight to the body of knowledge acquired during an individual's education or professional training. These bodies of knowledge, the combined mental resources of groups of similarly educated or occupied individuals have spawned cultures of their own, leading their members to think and see things in certain ways, to focus on certain aspects of a situation and neglect others, to favor the solutions that they can best control. Thus higher education, rather than elevating the condition of the community as a whole, helps to create and maintain giant rifts between those with varying levels and areas of expertise.

When we venture out, move away from our niche of shared knowledge and attitudes, and shared definitions of ethical conduct, moral clarity blurs. We are in daily contact with neighbors who are too close to ignore, but due to differences in education, language, ethnic heritage and economic strata, are too distant for meaningful communication. The confusion we often feel when confronted with those with different backgrounds speaks to just how isolated we've become, and points to the necessity of building bridges over these barriers.

Renato Rosaldo insists we can learn to act adaptively to foreign or poorly understood circumstances, that our most precious resource is our ability to improvise. He suggests we should meticulously attend to the boundaries between social groups where learned patterns of interaction fail us. "*A focus on nonorder directs attention to how people's actions alter the conditions of their existence, often in ways they neither intend nor foresee*" (Rosaldo, 1989, 102). Nonorder, or confusion at the meeting place between cultures, he tells us, is the optimal site for positive change. In his "cultural citizens project" at Stanford, Rosaldo insisted on taking a back seat and allowing the community of marginalized voices to be not the objects of his analysis, but the "analyzing subjects." He wanted to learn how they understood their own interactions with the larger community, and importantly how they understood the actions of the members of the dominant group in their community. Rosaldo's aim was to learn to see himself as his community of interest saw him.

"And we were trying to think about things like privilege. How does privilege work? When you're inside it you don't know it. Because it's so comfortable to be inside privilege, right? We're always sometimes inside privilege and sometimes outside of it, I would say. But it is something that doesn't work from self-criticism; it takes a kind of dialogic criticism, somebody who's outside it saying, "I bump against this privilege that you don't even notice because I'm outside of it, so I bump against it." (Rosaldo, 2002, interview with Hilton Obenzinger)

The current investigation has much in common with Rosaldo's work, although it's the thinking of the privileged group we are interested in. We are asking our students to 'bump against' another culture and tell us what they learn from the experience. We are looking at the ways students at UCSD develop the skill set necessary to navigate the boundaries between themselves and those from differing economic and cultural groups, with the ultimate goal of evaluating and improving the design of the learning contexts we are able to offer them. Like Rosaldo, we have made every effort to situate our undergraduates as "analyzing subjects," privileging their observations and comments over our own. We believe that cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), as developed in the works of Vygotsky, Cole and others, is a useful framework for addressing issues of boundary crossing for two reasons. First, it forces us to acknowledge that the interactions we observe are discretely situated in time and place, and that

these interactions are, to varying extents, constrained by their unique histories and locations. Second, CHAT allows us to investigate intercultural activities through their artificial (artifactual?) mediation. Cultural-historical theorists argue that humans communicate using culturally developed artifacts, or tools of mediation that are ever-present, permeate all areas of human interaction and include not only material items but the semiotic systems pertaining to gestures, languages and to all varieties of specialist knowledge and fields of practice. Clothilde Pontecorvo explains that artifacts within educational settings “...are procedures, thought methodologies and cultural objects that have to be appropriated, practices of discourse and reasoning that have to be developed, and play or study practices that have to be exercised (1993, p. 191)” Moreover, Cole (2006) points out that the use of these artifacts has consequences; the appropriation and use of specific artifacts influence both our social interactions and our intrapersonal thought processes.

Central to the present investigation is the implication of an ongoing reciprocal relationship between all things cultural and personal, interpsychological and intrapsychological. We are directly concerned with how and why artifacts are selected and used within a specific social context, and how and why the adoption and implementation of these artifacts allows the users to regulate and inform social interactions and intrapersonal development. In an effort to understand how the personal histories of our students inform their present relationships we have adopted the perspective of James Wertsch (e.g. Wertsch & Sohmer, 1995) who emphasizes the way in which the mastery of a particular repertoire of mediational means reflects specific cultural, historical and institutional settings, and “locates individuals in sociocultural history” (p.334). Specifically, we have looked at the relationship between the social interactions observed during the study and the cultural resources available to facilitate those interactions, both those resources brought in by the undergraduates in the form of attitudes and ways of seeing, and those we are able to offer at the Fifth Dimension site.

Our research is conducted within a regularly-scheduled upper-division undergraduate class, Comm115/HDP115 - The Design of Social Learning Contexts. As a part of the curriculum for this class the students participate two afternoons per week in La Clase Magica, a service learning program on the grounds of a local Catholic mission. This program is part of the “Fifth Dimension,” a larger university-community outreach project designed by Mike Cole where learning resources and cultural practices are combined in fundamentally new ways (Cole 2006). The Fifth Dimension program is an educational activity system offering school age children an after school program aimed at improving basic literacy skills, and college students the much needed practicum experiences to accompany their lecture classes. At the community sites the university students are encouraged to link theory with practice, to confront and reflect on their understandings of teaching and learning, and often to interrogate their prior conceptions of the lived experience of children in different cultural groups. On campus these students attend seminars where they read germinal papers and discuss theoretical and practical issues in light of their experience at Fifth Dimension sites.

At the Fifth Dimension the roles of the undergraduates and the community children are organized around the concept of the “zone of proximal development” as put forward by Lev Vygotsky, who saw particular patterns of social arrangements crucial for development. The “zone of proximal development” relates to social interactions among participants with unequal competencies for the task at hand, and is described by Vygotsky as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978,86).

The idea of “more capable peers” is especially useful in Fifth Dimension settings as it inhibits the notion that the undergraduates should take on the role of teacher while allowing them to capitalize on their knowledge when appropriate. It is also a flexible model that allows for an interchanging of roles. The reality of Fifth Dimension interactions is that the undergraduate is often the less capable member of the undergrad/child team in areas of game expertise, knowledge of a second language, or (due to quarterly turnover) general familiarity with the site. A feature of the zone of proximal development, one that is rarely explored but is implicated in our observations, is that development is taking place by all participants, be they an apprentice or a more capable member of the community of learners.

Zones of proximal development are transient phenomena, taking shape, breaking down and reshaping as social interactions progress, and are part of the larger cultural-historical social framework where all functions of cultural development appear twice, once on the social level between people and then within the individual (Wertsch, 1985). In different words, Vygotsky saw higher mental processes emerging through social interaction before they were internalized by the individual. Within this model the nature of the historical and contextual social reality in which development occurs plays a crucial role in the developmental processes and must be specified in the design and evaluation of the learning environment. It’s important to note that Fifth Dimension programs strive to adapt to the social-cultural-economic ecology of the local community, designing site content and activities that incorporate the linguistic and cultural “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1999) of the participating families.

The goals of Fifth Dimension are many and each term the curricula are differently nuanced depending on the location and population of the site and the interests of the various instructors and researchers. The majority of the children at La Clase Magica are from Mexican immigrant families and speak Spanish at home. Accordingly, underlying virtually every activity that occurs on site is the desire to celebrate and sustain the culture and language of the families while promoting the children’s English skills and developing the skill set necessary to fully participate in the larger community. An example of this is the creation of bilingual task cards that are used by undergrad/child teams, where a child who can’t read well but can speak Spanish and an undergrad who can read but does not understand Spanish, must each contribute and combine their different resources to accomplish goals in their work and play together (Cole, 2006. Vasquez, 2002).

Since an important research goal this quarter was to look at economic class and cultural border work, the reading list for the Com115 class was amended to include “Creating Cultural Connections: Navigating Difference, Investigating Power, Unpacking Privilege” by Reitenauer, Cress and Bennett (2005). Central to these authors’ argument is the belief that intercultural competence is a mindset and a skill set that can be cultivated. These authors offer Bennett and Bennett’s “continuum of development of intercultural sensitivity” suggesting we move through six progressive stages on the way to intercultural competence, beginning with denial (deep down we are all the same) moving through defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and finally, integration, where “*individuals consciously live in ways that bring them into full participation in two or more cultures simultaneously*” (p.75). Montavani uses the term “lost innocence” to denote this final level of intercultural thinking and describes it thus:

“In encounters on the boundaries between cultures, each person easily sees the faults of other’s worlds, but understands the defects of his own only slowly and with difficulty. In the end the Philippine head hunters and the American anthropologist find themselves closer to one another, but not because they have agreed that homicide is universally practiced and so the less fuss made about it the better. On the

contrary, the two sides feel for the practices and beliefs of their own environment, which they had previously accepted, the same disgust they felt when faced with the practices and beliefs of other societies” (Montavani, 2000, p.78).

A set of interrelated theoretical ideas are developed by the authors discussed above that together provide the framework for our vision of a new level of intercultural competence, grounded in an understanding that cultural practices are historical, situated, mediated and dynamic, and a notion of cultural awareness as the internalization of another culture, to the extent that we are able to see ourselves through new eyes, through the eyes of those we have come to know and understand through intentional and sustained effort. Implicit in this line of thinking is an understanding that the skill set necessary for intercultural competence cannot be taught or learned in a lecture hall, but must develop through social cultural experience. Through a CHAT lens, specifically by observing the selection and use of cultural artifacts in multicultural social interactions, we are striving for a better understanding of the development of this kind of cultural awareness in the hope of creating ever-better contexts for this development to take place.

Undergraduate Students:

Nineteen undergraduate Communication, Human Development and Psychology majors participated in this study, 18 female, 1 male, all between 20 and 23 years of age. Of the 19 students, 11 reported Asian heritage, one Middle Eastern, and 7 European-American.

Twelve of the students speak English at home, 4 speak Cantonese, 3 Korean and one speaks Arabic. All but two of the students have at least one parent who is English proficient.

The highest education level attained by both parents was determined from the undergraduates self reports and served as an indicator of socioeconomic status. Among the 38 parents there are nine PhDs, twelve master’s degrees or post graduate credentials, seven bachelor’s degrees, six two-year credentials, and four high school diplomas

La Clase Magica Children:

Thirty-six children, 15 girls and 21 boys were enrolled in the La Clase Magica after school program this quarter. The daily attendance fluctuated broadly, some days there were as few as 8 or 9 children at the site, the maximum was 29. On a typical day 18-22 children were in attendance. The children ranged in age from 3- 16, the mean age at the time of this writing was 8.6.

One child is of Malaysian descent and speaks English and Malay at home. The remainder of the children are Mexican American and speak Spanish at home. Six of the Spanish-speaking students have one parent who is semi-proficient in English.

The highest education level of the parents was determined from an interview with one of the site directors who has a long standing relationship with about 75% of the participant families. Only one parent, the single mother of the Malaysian child, was educated in the United States and holds a Bachelors degree in Electrical Engineering. One mother and father pair have Mexican high school diplomas, one father has the Mexican equivalent of a US eighth grade education, and the remainder of the parents were educated in Mexico for an estimated average total of 2-4 years.

Data and methods of analysis:

The data for this study are gathered from the written narratives (field notes) of the undergraduates, audio-recorded guided class discussions among the undergraduates, one-on-one conversations both on campus and at the site during the course of the class, a one-hour video recorded interview with one undergraduate judged to be representative of the group, and the observations of the author and other researchers who were regularly at the site.

After each site visit the undergraduates each wrote finely detailed field notes from their experience. These were submitted to a central electronic database. The field notes were crafted according to a template that included a description of the “general context” (the undergraduates broad observations about the site activities on the day of their visit) “focused observations” (a detailed account of the undergraduates interactions at the site that includes personal evaluations and direct quotes) and “reflections” (placing the day’s activities and interactions in the broader context of the class experience and of the undergraduates personal history). At the end of the course the students produce individual research papers that focus on topics of personal interest. These had not been completed at the time of this writing, but will be an important source of information as the investigation progresses.

I read the field notes each week and searched for discussions that demonstrated the undergraduates’ awareness of differences, their evaluations of the reasons for or ramifications of these differences, how they impacted the interactions, and the adaptations that were made to compensate for them. The structure of the discussion below is dictated by trends observed in the data, but is by no means fixed and most certainly will be recast as new data are added, or when analyzed by a different researcher.

For the most part this discussion is among the undergrads; I have made every effort to let their voices be heard, but what little analyses there are, and importantly the choices that have been made in what to include and leave out, have been directed by my position in the project, that of a female graduate researcher, a generation older than the undergraduates, participating in La Clase Magica twice weekly in a hands-on organizational role, and deeply committed to the development of the graduate students and the La Clase Magica children alike.

Miguel’s Curtains:

Each Fifth Dimension site is carefully arranged to promote communication and joint meaning-making among the undergraduates and local children, but there is no predicting the outcomes – even, or perhaps especially, when the simplest artifacts, like crayons and paper, are selected to mediate interactions. In the second week at the site a simple art project provoked an incident that made the vast differences in living conditions between the undergraduates and the children at La Clase Magica all too palpable, and precipitated a profound shift in undergraduate attitudes toward the children and their families.

Miguel is in second grade. He and his little sister, Juanita, have been coming to Clase Magica for just over a year. Miguel’s mother Angeles, a tiny, pretty, energetic woman, takes a fierce interest in her children’s homework progress. She is acutely aware of her inability to help Miguel and Juanita with their homework and insists that their time at the site is spent accomplishing the tasks that she cannot assist them with at home. Angeles does everything she can to express her gratitude to the undergrads and facilitators at the site, cleaning, running errands, bringing food for those of us who work with her children, and thanking us profusely at the end of every session. Early in the quarter Miguel was sitting

at the homework table with several other children and they all were discussing an art project he was working on. Below is one undergraduate's account of the conversation:

“On this second assignment Miguel was to draw a map of his bedroom from a bird's eye view. Needing some help to read the instructions for this assignment Miguel also need some help understanding the assignment as he did not at first understand how to draw his room from the top down with a birds eye view. After discussing the assignment for a bit Miguel began to better understand how to draw his room and as he drew he described to me what was in his room. Through this assignment my own prejudices quickly came into judgment as I soon learned that Miguel shared a room with his little sister Jasmine, his parents, his grandma and his older cousin. Sharing one room with five other people. I kept thinking that Miguel was just confused and that all those people were really not all in a single room but as he kept saying how they were in the same room I finally understood. He explained that they had curtains between the rooms and that he and his sister would try and sneak out of their bunk beds to be able to see the television, hidden behind the curtain in his parents portioned area of the room. With the preconceived notion of what I thought his bedroom would be like I was surprised to learn how many people were in his room and I became more aware of the advantages and privilege which I have had.”(Catherine)

In class the next day the undergraduates who had been working at the homework table were eager to discuss the incident with the rest of the class – they were concerned and agitated and expressed a need for help in coming to grips with this new information. Sonja said,

“The way Miguel described his home was alarming - a curtain separated his bedroom from his parents and there a lot of cockroaches in his house. I vividly remember him telling us that his sister keeps her clothes next to the toilet - which at first I found odd but through discussion I realized it was her dirty clothes that she would put next to the toilet - which I sometimes still do.”

During the class discussion the students worked at coming up with analogous situations from their personal experience. While Sonja (above) was not able to identify with the close living quarters or the cockroaches, she did find a point of connection with the dirty laundry lying beside the toilet. Mandy and Victoria agreed that this put Miguel's mother's “...obsession with homework in a whole new light.” While they had been aware that no one at Miguel's home could help him with any assignments requiring English, they now understood that the task was further complicated by the lack of room – there simply was no space at home for Miguel to study. The undergrads compared this to their own homes where most of them had multiple settings for homework, they mentioned for example, desks in their own rooms, or in dad's or mom's office, kitchen counters, dining room tables, and, if they didn't get caught, coffee tables in front of the television – all options they had taken for granted.

Several of the Asian students expressed the view that they might have an easier time than the European Americans in understanding Miguel's home life since they had lived in close contact with people in Hong Kong, Taiwan and in the Asian communities here in the United States who were obliged at times to live with extended family in very small dwellings. Lydia, who is Korean, told the group, “*Where I live, it's a Korean and Chinese infested area (she laughs) and lots of families live like this – especially when they first come to the United States.*” They all admitted, however, that this had not been the case in their own homes.

Over the subsequent weeks this conversation was revisited often, and as Miguel's mom showed up at the site day after day we observed the undergrads paying special attention to Miguel and Juanita and treating their mother with an ever-growing respect. Mandy summed up the general attitude one afternoon when she told me, "*She (Angeles) wants so badly for them to learn. It's so important to her and to the kids' dad as well. It really makes me want to do every thing I can to help Miguel and Juanita do better in school.*" And Victoria makes the following observation in her field notes:

"Sometimes I think we forget to look further into why some children act the way they do and are guilty of making the assumption that it's probably nothing very serious. I never knew or even thought that these kids would be dealing with such serious issues. Learning about that has really helped me to open my eyes and be more supportive as a friend instead of just a playmate or "helper"."

Homework as a Site for Exploring Each Other's Values:

As Clothilde Pontecorvo points out, play and study practices are cultural artifacts that must be developed and exercised. Our undergraduates struggled not only to reconcile their ideas about homework priorities and procedures with those of the children, but also to understand how homework might mean different things and present different challenges and opportunities for the local families than they had assumed. Unlike the kids at other Fifth Dimension sites, the majority of the children at La Clase Magica arrive in the afternoon with admonitions from their parents to accomplish all of their assignments before moving on to the traditional Fifth Dimension games. Many of the children come to the site for the express purpose of finding homework assistance. Catherine's notes from the second day of the quarter sum this up nicely:

"Here the attitude seems very different- the children are working on homework immediately without any adult or undergraduate prompting and they work until it is completed not just until homework time is over. I am not sure of what the attitude difference is, but I have ruled out age because these children are the same ages as the children at the Boys and Girls club, perhaps it could be the difference in the way in which education is valued in their families? (I'd like to explore this idea more)."

Catherine's notes are typical of those submitted by the other undergraduates where they first commented on the heightened priority the families at this particular site placed on homework and then began to look for the reasons this might be so. In the notes from her subsequent visit Catherine continues to explore the reasons for the observed variations in attitudes towards homework, looking at family structure and family values as a possible source of difference.

"At this site the children are willing and grateful almost to have time to work on their homework. I think this is due in part to the fact that they need more assistance. ...it seems that many of these children might not have help at home because their parents might not understand the language or the assignment in general. Perhaps the children are more focused on homework at St Leo's because they realize they cannot get this type of help at home. Or perhaps education is valued more in their homes."

The subject of homework provided a window through which the undergrads were able to glimpse the value systems of the families they were interacting with, and likewise impart to the children their own beliefs about the importance of learning and work ethics. Mandy wrote extensively about her desire to understand why some of the children at LCM are passionate about their studies at an early age and others are not. A classmate responds to Mandy's notes and shows her concern for the long-term

consequences of early homework pressure, questioning whether or not it's the hard life that is most stressful for the children or the pressure the parents put on the children to better themselves that creates the largest burden:

"I learned last week that Freddie and Amy's parents emphasize education so much because they are both employed in manual labor positions and are apparently adamant that their children do not enter the same fields. But I often wonder what the effects of this kind of educational pressure can be on these kids. Amy seems so burdened by schoolwork all the time, and everyday I have visited LCM, I have heard her say that she is always so tired from it. On the other hand, she and Freddie are learning good work habits that may greatly benefit them in the future. Either way, I think it is important that we make sure they are enjoying their afternoons by encouraging at least some playtime."(Amy)

In a class discussion the undergrads grappled with ways to better assist the children in their homework. They tried to understand exactly how much and what kind of importance the parents placed on school success and spent a lot of time comparing their own family practices with those they saw at La Clase Magica. Jana told a story about overhearing a discussion between two boys at the homework table the afternoon before,

"An interesting thing that relates to our class discussion occurred when one of the older students interviewed Fernando with her video camera. He introduced his 18 year old "friend" he had drawn on his hand to the camera and when asked if Jamie (his hand friend) was in school Fernando replied, "No, he works." He replied it so matter-of-factly, as if it was silly to think an 18 year old would be in school."

This led to a discussion of the different values placed on education. Where the undergrads had been raised to see primary and secondary school learning as a prerequisite to university, they were now able to see it through the eyes of the La Clase Magica children - as a way to acquire the skill set necessary to find employment. This realization was striking to many in the group. One asked, *"What kind of job can a kid get at 18 anyway? Not one that is going to improve their standard of living very much. We have to find a way to reward these kids for staying in school."* But Carrie questioned the effectiveness of rewards, offering instead the opinion that school accomplishment should just be expected. *"In my family, when it came to school work, reward meant not getting punished."* Jana reminded the class that these values don't just happen, *"Only educated parents are going to think that way."* There was a consensus in the class that while the undergrads might be able to help the kids with their homework at the site, they could not begin to make up for the lack of educated parents who have not only the time to give homework assistance to their children, but also the mindset and the skill set necessary to do so.

We watched with special interest one undergraduate who made the following comment early in the term: *"These people just don't have the same work ethic. The kids are not interested in homework because education is not as important to them as it is to some other families."* This same student was the most visibly shaken by the story of Miguel's curtains and by the fourth week of class was lamenting the complexity of the school predicaments of many of the children at LCM and noting how fruitless it was to make any snap judgments about reasons for the children's poor school performance. Near the end of the term this student chose 'motivation' as a term paper topic and came to see me for references. When asked how the topic had finally been decided upon, the reply was, *"Well, I just remember thinking that some of the kids in my high school were really lazy, but now I don't know anymore. I kind of want to think about the motivation thing from a different point of view."*

In one of our afternoon de-briefing sessions the undergrads discussed what a difficult time they had getting some modeling clay to one of the children in time for her to create a model of a body cell that was due the following day, and Neal and Mona chimed in with a litany of hurdles they had faced in trying to help Carlos complete an assignment that included downloading and printing a photo of modern day Rome. The undergrads were incredulous to learn that often the LCM children had no way of accessing the resources necessary to complete their assignments, resources that the undergrads took for granted, like the clay, or computer and internet access, printers, writing supplies and more, not to mention instructions that were written in a language the parents could understand. Mona expressed the frustration the group was feeling at being able to peer across the wide divide between what was possible academically for the UCSD students, and what was possible for the kids at La Clase Magica, *“I just feel like everything is so much harder than it should be, like everything is stacked against them and while we can do little things, we can’t make it all right.”*

Channeling the Spirit of Fifth Dimension:

The Wizard(ess) is certainly the Fifth Dimension’s most marvelous and enchanting artifact. She is an ambiguous figure who is said to have created all of the 5D sites as places for children to learn and play. This entity makes itself known through gifts and letters and is available for online chats to voice concerns, to assist the children in achieving their goals, to mitigate disputes and to pique the children’s interest and curiosity. During each school term, a new incarnation of the Wizard emerges from the unique blend of personalities and activities at a particular site. In deference to the Mexican American culture that is cultivated at LCM, El Maga has established his/herself as the resident Wizard. Like all 5D wizards, El Maga has some disorienting habits, like changing languages or gender mid-sentence and growing younger each year, which lead to on-going discussions about who El Maga is, where El Maga lives, and what gender El Maga might be. Disputes about El Maga are temporarily settled by consensus only to arise again in altered forms allowing the children and undergraduates ample opportunity to engage in discussions about gender, power and responsibility.

The children write to El Maga to tell of accomplishments or report on things gone wrong, and El Maga responds. In a distributed process Mike Cole likes to call “channeling for the Wizard” the children’s letters are fielded by a number of different people who are involved at the site, undergraduates, facilitators, researchers and professors, each with their own style and concerns. The resulting inconsistency of responses is accounted for by constant laments about El Maga’s flakiness, forgetfulness, rotten sense of humor and general fallibility. Early in the term the undergraduates spent one class period crafting El Maga letters from colored paper, markers, glitter, glue and stickers. After class Lydia voiced an opinion common among the group when she told me, *“I was wondering how to make El Maga real for the kids. I needed to know what kinds of things would attract them and hold their interest. How could I make El Maga into someone they would love and trust?”*

El Maga’s strength lies in her total disregard for boundaries. He pays no attention to gender, bounces between languages, celebrates all holidays and makes up some of her own, and changes plans midstream - always working in the best interest of the children and in an effort to achieve harmony and community spirit. This quarter the undergraduates immediately fell upon the idea that El Maga could be an invaluable resource in bridging the some of the gaps they were experiencing between themselves and the children. Neal puts it this way:

“Without a doubt, the most significant incident in this site visit is setting up an instant messaging activity between the kids and El Maga. I have heard of El Maga before in my other class, and understood that his/her identity was supposed to be a mystery. In my opinion, it was a great idea to create the figure El Maga, a figure that the kids looked up to, a figure that the kids would be willing to share their problems with.”

Neal goes on to say that the children he was working with were able to say things to El Maga that they could not say to him. This provided Neal with valuable information that he was able to use in helping the children solve some disputes they had been having among themselves. Similarly, Penelope shows how she was able to use El Maga to deal with some of the concerns one little boy had over his grandmother’s (his principal caretaker) injury.

“Juan suddenly told me about his grandmother who was injured by a cut on her hand. I asked if he feels ok, he nodded. He told me his grandmother had put some medicine on her wound. He also said he comforted his grandmother when she was hurt. Juan showed his worry. He looked down for a few seconds after he finished talking. “I don’t know. I dreamt about El Maga. He is in my dream.” I was surprised that El Maga, an ambiguous figure, can have such an influence on Juan....I suggest to him to write to El Maga ...I told him he can tell El Maga about his grandma.”

Luz, one of the regulars at LCM developed a special bond, almost an obsession, with El Maga. She would rush every afternoon to set up an on-line chat and monopolize the computer, sometimes for the entire session. The undergrads saw this as a good thing for Luz and made every effort to see that Luz was able to converse for at least a few minutes each day with El Maga. One day Luz came in visibly distressed and told us that she had invited several friends to celebrate her birthday at her grandmother’s house the day before, but that no one had brought any presents. An undergraduate suggested that she discuss her disappointment with El Maga, who cheered her up by offering to send a gift to La Clase Magica in the near future. The undergrad then purchased a small gift and sent it through “wizard mail” to a very happy Luz. One afternoon a story was read to the children by a visitor who wore a hand puppet portraying “la mosca cosmica”, the pesky little fly who bugs up everything (is blamed when computers crash, supplies go missing, pencils break, etc.) and, importantly, has direct access to El Maga. Luz was surprisingly intimidated by this storyteller and kept her distance. Lydia wondered if perhaps Luz thought the storyteller *was* the entity on the other end of her daily computer chats, and was concerned that Luz’s treasured friendship with El Maga might be diminished if the illusion was destroyed, so we encouraged Luz to stay online with El Maga during the story telling to prove that this person was not El Maga.

The resident Wizard at each Fifth Dimension site, El Maga in this case, is an illusive concept that can’t be forced or rushed but needs to emerge naturally through the efforts and good humor of the entire group. Chronicling the morphoses of the 5D wizards provides us an opportunity to watch the way artifacts move in and out of form and purpose in response to the needs of the community they serve. One undergraduate, Penelope, was especially baffled by the idea of an evolving wizard and discussed El Maga at length with her friends and with another professor in the department. In response, El Maga sent a letter to ‘clear things up.’ Later in the week we overheard Penelope telling the other undergrads that she finally understood, *“El Maga is what we make of her.”*

The Asian-Mexican Connection, Language and Culture: the ubiquitous artifacts:

“When I speak Spanish I feel like more a part of their world. They think it’s funny to hear an Asian girl speak Spanish. They say, Hey! That’s kind of cool, and they listen to what I have to say more,”(Joo-li)

More than half of the undergraduates this quarter are Asian, and like the children at La Clase Magica, have acquired English as a second language. Before arriving at the site on the first day, some of the Asian undergrads expressed concern that their accented English and total unfamiliarity with Mexican culture would present problems. Specifically they were concerned that they would find little common ground with the kids, and that the children might see them as foreign and difficult to relate to.

“I was not very sure for the best methods of communicating with the kids, but I know I was there to help them. I’m an international student from Hong Kong. Spanish is not a commonly learned language back there.” (Mona)

“Carrie and I were both born out of the states and we both could somewhat empathize with the kids at LCM. We sure felt confused and lost with all the mixed signs our parents were giving us; one hand they wanted us to only speak English and soon they were trying to enforce our native tongues on us!” (Joo-li)

But by the end of the day they were already speaking in positive terms and making quips about the “Asian-Mexican connection” and within a few short weeks the Asian undergrads had devised ways to capitalize on their heritage, building bridges by focusing on the ways they were like the La Clase Magica kids in being different from the mainstream American students. We made several attempts in our discussions to tease apart the effects of language and cultural differences, but inevitably the two issues collapsed into one. While this proved frustrating in our analytical efforts, it is also telling in itself; the undergrads simply could not separate the two.

I noticed Juan using the name 'Danny'. .. I was confused why he had called it a "second name" and not a "middle name" but thinking back to my experience, I kind of understood. I wasn't born in the states and when I came to California in the 3rd grade, I had to make a big transition; I could no longer go by the name 'Joo-li' that people could not pronounce, I had to go by 'Lydia' because it was easier to say, and because it sounded more "American." As a little child, this had a tremendous impact. All my life, I was called by and identified with 'Joo-li' but now I had this new and foreign name that I felt was not yet a part of myself. It felt un-natural to turn around and respond to people who would call me by 'Lydia'. It really was my 'second name'. Now I have 'Lydia' as my middle name (though I identify with it as my first name) and I feel like I have to identities. When people call me 'Joo-li' I turn on this Korean part of myself, and when people call me 'Lydia' I turn on the American part of myself. I try to think of myself as one whole being, but I cannot ignore the obvious differences in my behavior and thought when I identify with either one. It was a really difficult transition for me as a child, I can only imagine what Juan/Danny is going through. (Joo-li)

Alexis and I were chatting with each other for a little while. She told me a little about herself. She said she’s half American half Mexican and lives near from LCM. She asked if I’m an American and where I live. I told her I’m not an American but a Canadian-born Chinese and I live in a place called Hong

Kong. Then, Jesus and Fernando joined us, I asked the kids whether they know where Asia was, Fernando quickly said "Near India!" Jesus said he did not know; whereas Alexis gave me a look as if she was clueless. And so I said Fernando's answer was almost there, India is in Asia. And then not very long after, the kids started greeting each other in different languages. I heard them saying 'How are you?' in Spanish, Japanese, and English. They were all laughing as they mouthed the words out. Jesus was keep saying 'Konnichiha,' which was good morning in Japanese. I quickly asked Jesus why and what makes it so funny saying out good mornings in different languages, and he said 'It's just funny! It sounds funny saying it another way.' Then I made him say the 'Konnichiha' again and I also taught the kids how to say it in Cantonese, which is 'Cho Sun.' Then again, they all laughed." (Mona)

By the end of the quarter the Asian students viewed their differences as important additions to the repertoire of tools they could call upon at La Clase Magica, and were integrating their unique cultural resources into their daily activities with the children. The following excerpt from Neal's notes are typical of the comments made by the Asian students in the second half of the quarter:

"From my experience with Freddie, I realized that it's very helpful for the UGs to use their own personal experience to help the kids in learning. For example, Freddie and I both came from families where English isn't the first language. Thus, I have encountered the difficulties in learning English, especially the spelling and pronunciation. So I shared with Freddie with some methods that I have adopted when I first learned English, and it was very satisfying to see that Freddie had made some significant improvement after my advice. That being said, it's essential for the UGs to think about the kids' background (for example, coming from poor families, coming from Spanish-speaking families, etc), and use different strategy to help teaching them. I think that it was very essential for the UGs to try their best in narrowing the gaps between them and the children. Obviously, we have huge differences. In my experience with Freddie today, I was able to find a common situation (both come from a non-English speaking family), and a common interest (our interest in Dragon Ball Z). At the end of the day, I am sure that Freddie had enjoyed my company a lot." (Neal)

Late in the quarter one of the other researchers commented that he had noticed a subtle shift in the attitude of the group, from one where the Asians and Mexicans were outsiders together, to one that questions who the insiders are exactly – no one really fit that mold. We noticed the Asian students were taking a broader perspective on their interactions at La Clase Magica, discussing their interactions less in terms of the two ethnic groups, situating themselves and La Clase Magica in the larger university-community alliance instead. In the following quote Lydia explains how she compared her own childhood to that of the kids she was working with at La Clase Magica and in the process makes a broader statement about the multicultural dimension of the larger community.

"I was telling Luz and Fernando that we lived in an Asian, a Chinese and Korean ghetto. (Laughs) Even the signs and things were in Chinese. You could live there with no problems and never speak English. But when I went to school there were only one or two, one Korean, in my class, so I had to speak English to communicate with my friends, well, my classmates and my teachers. I was surprised to learn that some of them spoke other languages at home, they all looked American to me. I think everyone feels like they are on the outside in some ways. It's just more obvious if you have an accent or Asian features." (From Lydia's Interview)

In addition, due perhaps to their new position as the minority group at the site, the European-American students were making more of an effort to learn and use Spanish than they had in the past, and were making comments in their notes that suggested they were seeing the Spanish speaking children more as a resource, as cohorts in a joint learning endeavor, than as an underprivileged group in need of charity.

“[My interactions with Maria are] a true example of the undergrads learning more than the students. I believe being actively exposed to both languages has really helped Maria become bilingual, providing an ideal opportunity for me to practice my Spanish. My Spanish skills are slowly improving and my understanding of bilingual communication is greatly increasing... In many ways I feel that I am learning more from Maria than she might ever learn from me.” (Catherine)

The undergraduates and the La Clase Magica children developed an easy relationship with the language mix, one that helped to minimize the power differential and facilitate learning for all involved. It also helped to cultivate community spirit – shouts across the computer room of “how do you say ‘hot’ in Spanish,” or “what does ‘preparación’ mean?” were common occurrences, and when the answers came from unlikely sources, animated kudos and ‘high fives’ ensued. One unexpected benefit from the Fifth Dimension efforts to elevate the status of Spanish fluency for the La Clase Magica children has been a corresponding elevation of the value of Spanish fluency for the university students as well. Several undergrads have commented on how their Spanish has improved from the site experience and expressed a renewed interest in taking Spanish lessons.

“I took all this Spanish in high school but it never really meant that much to me. Now I know how important it is to speak someone else’s language if you really want to get to know them and understand their world. My Spanish has improved a lot. I think the kids have taught me more Spanish than I’ve taught them English.” (Amy)

The Advantages Wealth Provides:

No less important than the artifacts the undergrads brought with them or selected and reappropriated at the practicum site, were the artifacts they used in the university classroom. From the more than 20 readings they were assigned during the quarter, the only one that was repeatedly referred to in the undergraduates’ field notes was the chapter by Reitenauer, et al on unpacking privilege and coming to grips with difference. At the close of the term many of the students reflected on their own development in terms of the guidelines provided in the article; specifically, they discussed the advantages that growing up in relatively wealthy homes had provided. The most frequent comments directly related a parent’s high income with an increased amount of time the parent was able to spend with their children. The undergrads cited stay-at-home moms and fathers who helped with homework, trips to museums and internet searches as important features of their upbringing. The flip side of this was that they now understood how low income translated into long work days, working mothers and little time for one-on-one parent-child interactions. Most of the undergrads then carried their arguments one step further to include the education level of the parents as well.

“Simply put, I believe that my families’ emphasis on education (due to my father’s career in academia) and my families’ financial stability (thus able to give me the chance to receive English education even while I was in Hong Kong) both contributed a lot to what I have achieved... I believe that the biggest disadvantage of the kids was their parents’ lack of formal education in their mother language.” (Neal)

More than half of the undergrads described their parents as having an educated mindset, an unrelenting emphasis on the value of education and an expectation that their children would be successful students. These parents offered an example to be followed, explicit instructions about how to succeed in school, and consistent encouragement, punishment and rewards along the way.

“Ever since I have been young, my parents have always encouraged me to be involved in a lot of activities, to take academics seriously, and they have always fostered an environment that would enable high-learning. Because of our wealth, my parents could focus more on academics and not worry so much on paying the bills or financial aid. As a result, they were able to encourage me more and because of their own academic/financial success, they were able to mentor and guide me to do better in school and even in getting internships early on. Because of them, I am really set ahead for life and I already have prestigious job offers pouring out to me after college! It's truly a blessing and I'm very thankful for it. At La Clase Magica many of the children are unable to have opportunities to see what success looks like (the opposite of my childhood), so they're not always aware of some of the various occupations, graduate school opportunities, or even undergraduate college opportunities out there for them.” (Nancy)

Nancy and Victoria (below) come very close to describing Annette Lareau's notion of entitlement. Middle and upper class parents, Lareau (2003) suggests, engage in a parenting style she calls *concerted cultivation*, or the deliberate stimulation of a child's development and fostering of their cognitive and social skills. Because this process entails bringing education to the child's feet and intervening in the schools and social services in the child's best interest, children from privileged families develop an entitled mindset, the belief that they have a right to participate fully in all that society has to offer, a right to unlimited aspirations. Conversely, children from working class families, where parenting most often entails providing comfort, food and shelter, limit their dreams to what they see as possible.

“My mother did not have to work, so it was nice to have her home, she made sure that I did my homework while she also made sure that I understood the benefits of a successful career. Overall, my parents lead by example and considering the nice things I was able to have as a child, now if I want to continue to live that kind of life I better work hard to get there. Expectations are huge. I am where I am because greatness was expected of me. Also, as for the LCM kids...I feel as though they may be disadvantaged in the sense that their parents might not set that kind of example for them. They may not know that they are capable of greater things. I just hope that their parents are telling them to shoot for the stars.” (Victoria)

Finally, several of the undergraduates observed that wealth has a way of shrinking the world, of broadening one's worldview. For the foreign-born students this meant they had learned English and traveled to the United States to attend university. The American-born students had taken educational trips abroad during their years at private schools, some had studied abroad and vacationed with their families in Europe, Asia, Australia and South America. Victoria noted that at very least, sufficient income provides access to and literacy in the various media that bring the world into our lives whether or not we leave our hometowns.

The Fifth Dimension as an Ecosystem:

At the Fifth Dimension the university students and local community members were interacting in ways that directly challenged earlier beliefs and exposed the existing social barriers. Through a CHAT lens

we saw the undergraduates constrained by ways of thinking that were laden with complications from their personal histories. Far from simplifying their situations, we further complicated the students' predicament by offering new tools and perspectives with which to inform and interrogate the judgments and decisions we were asking them to make, and new learning contexts rich in organizing resources designed to provide opportunities and experiences where their own understandings could deepen and develop. Each participant found themselves in situations where their often erroneous preconceptions were exposed within a nonthreatening space. We then watched as they became acclimated to this carefully designed practicum environment, chose from the selection of artifacts available to them, and used them to bridge the socioeconomic, language, education and culture gaps they observed between themselves and the local children.

Like many of the group, Catherine took advantage of this opportunity to shift her vantage point one step away from the safety of her privileged worldview and a little closer to that of the children at la Classe Magica.

"Since I have been in college I have taken many classes, which have really broadened my mind to the culturally diverse world we live in. And I have come to believe that cultural differences do exist. At St. Leo's Mission I went in knowing that there would be cultural differences, but because I so often base my judgments around what is the norm for me, I was shocked when Miguel was telling me how his entire family lived in a single bedroom. Assuming I had misunderstood I pressed him with questions about this, but as he elaborated I could feel my face blushing as I realized how wrong my assumption had been. Using your own life as a point of reference is common for making sense of the world, but in making reference with my own life I have learned I often make very presumptuous assumptions about others. I also learned that to feel bad when others do not have what I have is to act as if I think I am some how better than them. I do not believe it is right to feel sorry for people because they are not asking for pity and who is to say that what I value is any better than what they value."(Catherine)

We would like to believe this shift in perspective that subtly altered the interactions at la Classe Magica this quarter could be an enduring one, and that we can in fact create learning contexts where nascent yet sturdy working communities of learners, *idiocultures*¹ (Cole, 2006) can develop. We view these mini ecosystems or "ecologies of thinking" (Hutchins, 1996) as organizational solutions to the variety of problems the undergraduates and children are faced with. Here the contribution of each of the participants provides the necessary elements in the environment of the others, hopefully in the correct amount and at the times they are needed. Such systems, Hutchins tells us, are constantly being produced and reproduced, and only in real life practice can we see the connection between the history and the future, and between cultural structure and human thought processes. The students' reflections clearly demonstrated the ways these social ecosystems of interwoven actions and artifacts are held together by common goals and common agreements about the constituent roles and expectations. When goals were met, a certain equilibrium was set that satisfied the demands of the different participants involved and the successful routines became stable elements in the performance of common tasks. With few exceptions the undergraduates commented on the give-and-take nature of the site activities, expressing,

¹ An idioculture is defined by Gary Fine (1987) as "A system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis for further interaction. Members recognize that they share experiences, and these experiences can be referred to with the expectation they will be understood by members thus being used to construct a reality for the participants."

often in wonder, the belief that they were taking away at least as much as they were contributing. Jana's comments are typical. *"My relationship with the students became a relationship of equals working together to learn as much as we could from each other."*

The reflections also reminded us that the development of undergraduate attitudes and the subsequent effect of this development on the 5D community could not be predicted by an understanding of the curriculum and knowledge of the students involved. Seana Moran and Vera John-Steiner (2003) speak directly to this phenomenon when they argue that Vygotsky saw all development as intrinsically creative. Accordingly we saw the appropriation, transformation and reorganization of incoming information arbitrated by the undergraduates' individual characteristics and existing knowledge to produce a personal, embodied and yet social mindset. In turn, the social activities that the students participated in bore the mark of the unique personalities of the players involved, making the patterns of interaction, and often the outcomes unpredictable. The unique idioculture of the Fifth Dimension and the histories and personalities of the undergraduates function in relationship with each other, connecting past to future, student to community, in ongoing interdependent developmental processes. According to this logic, all of the development we observed is by definition both creative and profoundly social.

Final thoughts:

Literature on discovery and persuasion tells us that insights and lasting changes in mindset are most often the result of sustained effort – that an "aha" experience of sudden intuition almost always follows an impasse during which traditional remedies were considered, applied, and judged insufficient (Magnini, 1994). The lesson here is that personal involvement and commitment are indispensable in learning to improvise responsive resolutions to the social dilemmas our students will face. Activity marks the point of departure, provides the sole means of moving from stagnant theoretical answers toward creative reflexive solutions. We can't merely throw persuasive arguments at our undergraduates and expect them to distill from these the raw materials needed to construct solutions to the social dilemmas they will encounter.

We watched this quarter as our undergraduates progressed from being uncomfortable bystanders at La Clase Magica, incapacitated by their unfamiliarity with the place, the people and the language they encountered there, to being actively involved, emotionally engaged members of the LCM community. While they were given information to help situate themselves and the children within the broader social matrix, they were not instructed in how to go about navigating the distances that existed between the children and themselves. From the carefully constructed learning context, however, they chose artifacts, tools and strategies like El Maga, homework procedures, and bilingual games, that earlier participants had passed down to them, and adapted them to span the spaces they perceived. These students have taken the first steps in coming to grips with their own privilege, in understanding the complexities of the lived experience of those with less, and in building bridges between the two worlds – the first steps toward intercultural understanding. This extraordinary achievement simply could not have taken place inside the lecture hall.

Cultural evolution theorist Robin Dunbar (2005) tells us even the smallest incremental steps taken in one direction during the course of social experience can have important implications for the future of a community. The baby steps that our undergraduates are encouraged to take in the Fifth Dimension toward the purposeful identification and bridging of class and cultural boundaries have the potential to shift the students' worldviews just a little, to change their life trajectories only slightly, but I'm

convinced by the students own accounts of their experiences that they can and do make a positive difference in their lives and in the health of our communities.

Bakhtin explains how intercultural competence entails viewing one's own culture from the standpoint of another, "*In the realm of culture, outsidership is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that a foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly.*" Montavani, Renaldo and Reitenauer, et al. agree that we can cultivate an "outside" perspective, that "intercultural competency" is an attainable goal, but one that can only be acquired through purposeful sustained effort. Cultural historical activity theorists provide a model for social contexts in which such learning can take place, and Mike Cole brings this model to life in the form of the Fifth Dimension. Within these well designed learning environments that are strategically situated at the boundaries between cultures, responsible intercultural social involvement can be modeled, imitated and improved upon, and together instructors, students, local children and their families can develop the skill sets necessary to fully participate in the creation of a future where boundaries are a little less daunting and a little more permeable.

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