

**DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF GROUP PROCESS  
INSIDE A GROUP  
THAT RESISTS LEARNING ABOUT ITSELF**

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## **DEDICATION**

This research project is dedicated to the world of deeply democratic group processes that I have experienced in World Work workshops. It has been inspired by nostalgia for that world and fueled by an irrepressible desire to recreate it in other situations.

This project is especially dedicated to World Work alumni who find themselves, as I did, in a work situation where their newfound awareness and fluidity in groups are not welcomed. I hope it will inspire further research that supports you to continue your World Work journey when isolated in these kinds of work settings.

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## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How does the learning from a World Work workshop color subsequent experiences within other kinds of groups? Does it support deeper engagement in group processes? Does it inspire a person with new ways to interact, or does it create a kind of culture shock that leads to greater alienation? This paper, part diary of my experiences working in a Child Protective Services agency, is one person's answer to these questions.

In addition, this paper will attempt to answer another, more specific question: can World Work tools provide a template for doing inner work to increase awareness of a group's process while inside a group that resists learning about itself? Many consensus reality organizations differ from a World Work workshop in that they are not assembled primarily for the purpose of developing the group's awareness. Instead, they exist to do some kind of work. Values of productivity take priority over awareness. Working within established roles takes priority over developing fluidity moving in and out of them. These kinds of groups do not have a place for an awareness facilitator. In fact, forces in the organization may specifically hinder the group from developing awareness of itself. A person seeking to learn about this group's process needs to do so on her own. This paper seeks to contribute to Process Work by exploring ways World Work tools could help in this situation.

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## PROCESS WORK CONCEPTS AND TOOLS

In this and the next section, I will describe key concepts and tools used in Process Work and World Work. I will use different tools when addressing different research questions. When exploring how the experience of a World Work workshop colors subsequent experiences in other kinds of groups, I will mainly use the concept of High Dream / Low Dream / No Dream, described on pages 12 thru 14 and tools for differentiating between primary and secondary process, described on page 7. In later sections of this paper, when studying ways Process Work tools can be used to increase awareness of a group's process, I will use tools for unfolding a group process, described on pages 26 and 27, tools for differentiating primary and secondary process, described in page 7, and the tool of sentient inner work, described on page 15.

. . . . .

Process work, in its many applications, begins with the concept that problems contain the seed of their own solution. The tools of Process work are aimed at finding this seed and unfolding it, transforming disturbances or challenges into new information that a person, couple, or group can use to express itself more fully. As a method, Process Work begins by focusing on parts of a person's experience that he perceives as outside himself, happening to him. They may be positive experiences - ideals, for example, that inspire or attract but that cannot yet be attained. Or they may be negative experiences that are perceived as interrupting or in some other way disturbing the person's normal sense of himself. An early application of Process Work was with life-threatening or chronic physical symptoms, and, in all the applications to which process work has since expanded (such as the group work I will be studying in this paper), less known parts are experienced as a kind of symptom. In the prelude section of this paper, for example, I described the different ways awareness or evaluation is perceived by my organization as a force coming from outside itself, with a potential to harm or disrupt, a force that must be defended against.

## PRIMARY AND SECONDARY PROCESS

An assumption of Process Work is that my "symptom," the part perceived as existing outside of me, is actually just as much part of me as a more familiar and accepted part. In fact, in particular situations, I may strongly identify with this symptom and simultaneously perceive a familiar part of myself as something foreign. Process Work calls the part of my experience that I identify with in the moment my primary process and the part of my experience that, in the moment, I do not identify with my secondary process. Calling these two processes by neutral and similar terms helps us be not so bound by our identification in the moment.

## STRUCTURAL AWARENESS

Although primary and secondary processes are both parts of one's experience, it is important, in a particular situation, to appreciate the difference between them. Process Work calls the ability to do this structural awareness. It is important to distinguish primary from secondary process because we all have received a lifetime of training in how to relate to our and other's primary processes, but we need a special kind of attention to notice and appropriately relate to a secondary process. Generally, the primary process tends to ignore it or perceive it incorrectly as existing only outside the familiar self. To put it another way, a secondary process is typically experienced by the primary process in terms of the relationship that it has with the primary process, rather than as it is in and of itself. As such, it is experienced through the biases of the primary process. It exists inside a perceptual prison of the primary process mind set, which hinders it from fully expressing all aspects of itself and contributing to the identified self's expression. Identifying the secondary process through a structural analysis is the first step to reversing its marginalization by the primary process.

Structural analysis will be used in two parts of this paper. On page 49, I will use it to summarize my description of how my agency excludes evaluating from its sense of itself. It does not critically evaluate, criticizing happens to it and interrupts its operations. On page 77 thru 79, I will use it to help me organize my awareness of the field created by the interaction of coercion, reform efforts and cronyism within my organization.

## SENSORY GROUNDED AWARENESS

After noticing a “not me” part of my experience, the next step is to free it from this perceptual prison. Process Work accomplishes this through sensory-grounded awareness. This disciplined method of awareness seeks to experience the secondary process as pure information, without any interpretation by the primary process.

A good way to begin thinking about sensory grounded awareness is to consider what it is not. It is not an approach to perception that puts an experience into some category that the average person, in a normal everyday state of consciousness, would be assumed to understand. These kinds of categories have the effect of lulling awareness into a kind of hypnotic trance. The familiar identity hears one word and assumes it understands everything there is to know about an experience. Sensory grounded awareness avoids consensus reality labels in order to focus on a unique, shifting experience. For example, if I wanted to work on my resentment at being bullied by a supervisor in my organization, I would begin by setting aside the word bully and describing the experience to myself in such a way that another person, hearing my explanation, could know exactly what my unique experience of being bullied felt like. Different persons bullied in the same way might have very different experiences, or I might have a different experience at another time. I might feel a movement in my eyes, darting to and fro, and I might experience a similar darting in my thinking. I might feel a sensation of heat in my head. I may experience a problem with my peripheral vision. Or, I may have difficulties hearing what someone is saying to me.

Sensory-grounded awareness is not an awareness that places importance on my reaction to my experience. Calling an experience of bullying "demeaning" or "intimidating" for example, provides only very general information about how I, remaining in an everyday state of consciousness, feel myself responding to the experience. It says more about my more known identity than the experience itself.

Additionally, sensory grounded experience is not an intellectual interpretation of my experience or a rating of it according to some standard. If I share an experience of being bullied by my supervisor that I reacted to less strongly than I have in the past (implying some



kind of personal growth) this again says more about my primary process sense of myself as a growing person than about a process of bullying itself.

A sensory grounded experience is the first appearance of a secondary process. Something not yet fully known is emerging, and this is why it is inappropriate to label, react to or interpret it. It is best to keep the experience reduced to the bare bones of sensory experience at the start, so that one can engage in a journey of exploration to unfold its real meaning.

## CHANNELS

Sensory grounded experience is related to another Process Work concept: channels of information. Process Work understands experience as pieces of information that are sent or received through particular channels. Some of these channels correspond to the different senses. One can see an experience (experience it in the visual channel) hear it (experience it in the auditory channel) or feel it in one's body (experience it in the proprioceptive channel). Or one can experience it through one's movement or through reacting to another person's movement (movement channel). One can experience it as part of relating to another person (relationship channel) or as part of participating in a group (world channel). Both primary process and secondary process experiences occur in specific channels, but is especially helpful to note the channel of a secondary process experience because it is less known and, to learn more about it, it is helpful to communicate with it in the channel in which it occurs.

Returning to my earlier example of being bullied, if I approached this experience through the darting of my eyes or thinking, I would be in the movement channel; if I approached it through my sensation of heat, I would be in the proprioception channel; if I approached it through my problems with peripheral vision, I would be in the visual channel; if I approached it through my difficulty hearing another person speaking, I would be in the auditory channel. Staying in any one of these channels would support this less known experience to unfold and reveal more about itself.

## UNFOLDING A PROCESS IN A PARTICULAR CHANNEL

Starting with the darting movement of my eyes for example, there are many ways that I might unfold this piece of information. I could begin by simply repeating this movement, studying it, asking myself questions about its quality. Does it have a steady or erratic rhythm? What is its pace? Are the movements of my eyes short or long? With each question, I get a clearer impression of this movement. I could then try making this movement with my whole body, making a dance or athletic or other kind of movement out of the darting of my eyes. By focusing in this way on the movement itself, I am bypassing the perspective and opinions of my known identity to engage directly with an emerging process by speaking to it in the language of the channel in which it first appears. This gives it the space to unfold, or reveal more about what it is in and by itself, independent from my primary process.

## ADDING NEW CHANNELS

Often, this exploration will lead to me spontaneously expanding on my expression of this signal by adding another channel. For example, a sound could organically arise. I can explore this sound for qualities that could give me a richer awareness of the process that first appeared as a darting movement. Is it a low or high pitched sound? Is it loud? How loud? It is important that this new channel expression be congruent with the spirit of the first signal. Otherwise, it could be a sign that I am shying away from going too far into a less known part of myself.

## COMING TO THE EDGE OF MY KNOWN IDENTITY

At some point in bringing out a part I consider “not me,” the part I think of as “me” will resist going further. My primary process is defending itself against a secondary process’s emergence. Process Work describes this moment as coming to an edge. Edge behavior is divided into two types. The first occurs when I am incorporating a known but disavowed part of myself, and my identity reacts by questioning or rejecting this part. This activity stimulates the new part to express itself more vigorously, which in turn energizes the

better known part to resist more, leading to a disorganized buzz of different behaviors. An example of this kind of edge, expressed in the process of a group, is the intense but confused discussion of Child Protection work in the news media, which I described in the Prelude section. The community's primary process is to demand a powerful Child Protection agency that can police the parenting in the community. Its secondary process is to fear outsiders interfering with families. When problems develop with a case, these two sides are stimulated to respond simultaneously. Often the press will demand some forceful intervention at the same time as it is vehemently criticizing the action the department has taken. The next problem case to come to the public's attention may stimulate the opposite corrective action. The community becomes lost at this edge and becomes unable to go beyond its conflict.

The second type of edge behavior occurs when I leave the comfort zone of my known identity and approach an unknown part of myself. Rather than being disavowed because of previous bad experiences, this part is shunned because I do not know what to expect from it. Approaching a part that I have not yet experienced is like stepping off a cliff. Disorientation or fear may cause me to lose energy, become withdrawn, or feel depressed, behavior that is the opposite of the hyperactivity characterizing the other type of edge. Or I may block out the signals coming from a part for which I have no frame of reference. An example of this kind of edge is my agency's ignoring of the perspective of client families and members of the community who do not have professional status. The department has a mandate to engage with poorly functioning families to improve their parenting. This is its primary process. However, it does not understand or trust families that abuse their children. This is its secondary process. In the jargon of Child Protection work, it does not have a strength-based approach to its client families. It does not begin with the assumption that they want to be good parents or appreciate that, in spite of their problems, they have histories giving them an understanding about themselves that no professional can match. Unacquainted with such families, having only a generalized distrust of them, my department avoids including them in its planning.

Process Work has several approaches to working with an edge. The first step is to help the client re-engage with what she is rejecting or avoiding. Returning to the original hypothesis about the process structure can show the way through the confusion of edge behaviors. Another approach is to go back to the last point at which the unfolding of a process was proceeding without confusion or inhibition and to take up again from there. If

the client continues to resist her secondary part, the next step is to explore the edge itself. This edge should not be seen as only a disturbance in the client's process of becoming more aware. It contains important information for her personal development. Taking an indirect approach that includes appreciating the edge will help to find the most helpful way to bring in the secondary part.

## HIGH DREAM / LOW DREAM / NO DREAM

An important Process Work concept for understanding our attitudes and moods is *high dream / low dream / no dream*. A *high dream* state corresponds to being in love: we focus on the good qualities in a situation and block out any negative information that would challenge our positive outlook. When bad experiences disillusion us, we tend to go to the opposite extreme and see only the negative qualities in a situation. We get into a pessimistic mood that acquires a life of its own and colors all our perceptions. This is a *low dream* state. Many people swing between these two states, never developing an attitude that balances high and low. However, there is a third, *no dream* state that is open to positive and negative information. This state can organically follow the other two states and synthesize them. However, it is not a permanent destination in a process of forming an attitude. As things change, a *no dream* state will mutate into one of the other two states. A person's attitude moves constantly through these three states. What is important is to follow this process and be aware which state one is in.

As I have developed this research, this concept has become increasingly important. Learning to move fluidly between different states of dreaming has been one of the most valuable benefits of doing this research. The play of these three states is a major focus of this paper. One example is the official view that a bureaucracy has of itself, which expresses a *high dream* that the bureaucracy is fair and impartial, and that all management decisions are logical. (page 37) The view that staffs have of their personal interactions expresses their *high dream* that they all basically have each other's best interests at heart. (page 38) In contrast, the view expressed in a bureaucracy's gossip illustrates a *low dream* of betrayal and injustice. (page 38) News media present a *low dream* of Child Protection, focusing on its incompetence and defensive secretiveness. (pages 41 thru 48) I have attempted to supplement these perspectives by bringing in a *no dream* attitude about Child Protection.

Through exploring these states, I hope to develop the ability to flow with the constantly changing play of these states within myself.

Another goal of this study was to achieve a *no dream* attitude about my personal successes and failures bringing awareness to the business I work for. At the start of my journey as a World Work alumnus, I was in a *high dream* about World Work, but my return to my job brought me into a *low dream* of disappointment. (pages 53 thru 55 ) As I modified my work in Child Protection to better express World Work values, I vacillated between *high*, *low*, and *no dreaming*. When I was working in a new way, I enjoyed being in a *no dream*, constructive yet detached state, acting with integrity but with no expectations regarding how much I would accomplish. When I had a success that got the attention of other staff, I became optimistic about making an impact on my organization, or even the greater world of Child Protective work, and I got into a *high dream* state. On the other hand, because opportunities to work this way came only sporadically, I sometimes felt caught in the old routine and fell into *low dream*. After a few years of this, *Lo Dreaming* came back more strongly as I realized the limits of my ability. As a lone individual, to impact my organization as a whole. I became pessimistic and considered quitting my organization. (pages 55 thru 60) In the next phase, when I began facilitating Family Group Decision Making conferences, I was in a *high dream* state for about three years as I saw myself playing a role in a world wide-movement to revolutionize Child Protection work. (pages 60 and 61) However, when my department developed a backlash against family conferencing, I fell into *low dream*. (pages 62 thru 64) At present, I am exploring the possibility that this research might support me to find new ways to introduce World Work values into Child Protective work. I am in a *no dream* state, sure of my direction but not attached to an outcome.

Finally, in the summary section of this paper, I attempt to achieve a *no dream* self-appraisal of what I have accomplished in doing this research. I began this project with the *high dream* that I could develop adaptations of Process Work and World Work tools that other World Work alumni could use to integrate their learning. Currently, I am in a state that continues to respect this goal and believes it could someday be accomplished, but recognizes that I cannot to do it by myself. I hope that others will be inspired to take up where I have left off. This feels to me like a *no dream* state.

## DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PROCESS

Another way that processes can be categorized is by the state of consciousness a person is in when experiencing them. Most often a person will be in a CONSENSUS REALITY state. This is normal, everyday wakefulness as our culture understands it, so familiar that it is taken for granted. Our experience of time and space in this state is structured in accordance with the laws of Newtonian physics. This is the state of most of us when we seek remedy for problems. If I have a physical symptom, I hypothesize I was caught in the rain, or I ate some bad food. The rain or the bad food is the cause and my symptom is the effect. Effect always follows cause in consensus reality. They are also always located in proximity to each other. Weather in another country, or bad food eaten by someone else, cannot create my symptom. Every person in a normal state of consciousness agrees this is true: this is why it is called a consensus reality state.

In contrast, when we are in a state of consciousness that Mindell calls DREAMLAND, causes and effects can occur in any order or simultaneously, and they do not need to be physically close to each other. This is the state of consciousness of our dreaming. Mindell has discovered that it is also a state we sometimes occupy in our waking life. It is the state we enter when we are using Process Work Tools to find the useful information in a problem. In dreamland each person's experience is unique: there is no consensus among dreamers.

Mindell identifies a third state, even more different from consensus reality, that he calls ESSENCE. Here, there is no distinction between the person experiencing and the thing experienced. In consensus reality, I see a tree. In sentience, the tree also has a role in this interaction. The tree's action of being seen by me is as important as my act of seeing it. In fact the tree has another action, asking to be seen, that precedes this interaction of seeing and being seen. In the end there is only a field of interactions between me and the tree, inside of which discrete acts cannot be isolated in the way they are in consensus reality or dreamland. Experiences in this state of consciousness are in accordance with the laws of Post-Newtonian physics, descriptions of mystical experience and the perennial wisdom of indigenous peoples.

## SEEKING THE SENTIENT ESSIENCE

At certain points, while exploring what I can accomplish as a lone individual intellectually studying a group's experience, I will shift from an outer to an inner focus, using meditation to discover the sentient essence of an aspect of Child Protection work. A sentient state transcends the limits of normal thought. It is discovered by passing through consensus reality and dreamland to reach a mystical state of oneness. In this state, unexpected connections are revealed and I am able to feel compassion for myself and all others in a system. Seeking the sentient essence helps me resolve feelings of alienation and separation that can come from too much analysis. It dives beneath polarities and connects me with the whole field.

The method of sentient work that will be used in this paper begins with a sensory-grounded experience. It then asks where in my body I most deeply feel this experience. Step by step, it goes deeper into the experience's essence. Process Work sometimes suggests changing channels at each step to shed layers of everyday thinking and open to unexpected facets of the experience. It may, for example, shift from performing a movement, to making a drawing of that movement. In this paper, I will limit myself to verbal free association, sitting at my word processor allowing typing to happen as I meditate.

In later explorations of my organization's group processes, I will alternate between structural analysis and sentient essence work. I will use Process Work and World Work tools to organize the complexities I discover as my analysis deepens. Then, because I have found that meditation gives me an inner strength to maintain awareness of painful and confusing group situations that others are ignoring, I will use inner work to help me avoid becoming psychologically and spiritually lost in these complexities.

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## WORLD WORK CONCEPTS AND TOOLS

This research study explores new ways of viewing the group processes of a business. Its specific focus is a public agency providing Child Protection services. It is based on my experiences as a staff person in this agency. Although this business is the subject of my study, my starting point was a previous experience of another group, a World Work workshop. This experience led me to view my agency in a new way and raised questions that continue to haunt me. It is an implied point of reference for everything I write here. Therefore, at the start of this study, I want to briefly introduce the reader to World Work and then describe some of the concepts and tools of World Work.

World Work was developed by Arnold Mindell as an application of his Process Work, an approach to human problems that sees them as containing the seeds of their own solution. The “problem” with problems is that we are not able to recognize how they contain information to guide our continued personal development. We don’t see them as parts of ourselves that we need to become better acquainted with, but as things outside ourselves we need to get rid of. Process Work helps persons learn about the gifts that problems offer us, how they can contribute to a fuller expression of ourselves.

World Work applies this vision to our experiences in groups. Like an individual, a group can experience a part of itself, such as a subgroup representing a minority community, as a problem it needs to somehow get rid of by hurting or destroying it, exerting control over it, or simply ignoring it, considering it to be of less value than the majority. This is the group process that creates racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of bigotry. World Work, however, teaches groups how to reverse this process. Like an individual, a group can be guided to open up to parts of itself it has previously excluded. World Work can engage these marginalized parts and allow them to contribute to a fuller expression of the whole.

For example, with the help of World Work tools, a group can develop awareness of how it has excluded a certain racial, ethnic or religious minority. It can take responsibility for the suffering this exclusion has caused in the past and continues to cause in the present. African Americans were subjected to centuries of enslavement and economic exploitation, and there is a likelihood that they will continue to be treated as inferiors even in a group seeking to learn about racial prejudice. A group committed to learning about itself can be

helped to acknowledge this. In addition, such a group can be guided to recognize that its exclusion, of African Americans, for example, even causes trouble for the mainstream part of itself. People who cause suffering in others de-sensitize themselves to avoid becoming aware of their actions. Groups that exclude a minority community cut themselves off from aspects of themselves that correspond to traits of this community, such as fullness of emotional expression or richness of communal life. However, groups that marginalize can learn how to take responsibility for the damage they do to others and themselves. Inspired by their new awareness, they can welcome and include a previously marginalized part.

World Work achieves this inspiring vision of groups by convening workshops approximately every year and a half that are attended by as many as three hundred participants coming from as many as twenty different countries. They have been held in the United States, Poland, India, Greece, Australia, and England. Although English is the language of these workshops, many other tongues are represented: only a minority of the participants speaks English as their primary language. The size of these workshops, the diversity of their participants, and the variety of their venues, and languages all combine to create a space where every issue is welcomed, even issues which many group members have no prior knowledge of.

In summary, World Work is a highly creative group process animated by spirits of generosity and openness during which unexpected solutions to group problems are often discovered. More important than these solutions, however, is the group's learning about itself and about groups in general. World Work, like Process Work, is an awareness practice. Many participants leave the workshop with their expectations of groups changed forever. Never again are they able to participate comfortably in any group that does not invite and challenge its members to be aware of their interactions.

## TOOLS FOR GROUP WORK

### THE GROUP AS A CHANNEL OF INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE

Information about unknown, emerging parts of an individual can be transmitted through channels outside the person. Like proprioception, the world can be a channel of experience. For example, a person can be suffering from headaches that feel like the

squeezing of a vice. At the same time, his work and family lives may both be making greater demands on him, causing him to feel like they are squeezing him. An emerging process is expressing itself as a squeezing, in the feeling of his headache and the pressures of his life in the world. The individual's workplace or family may also experience squeezing as a group process. The individual and the group are different levels of a system in which the same process is happening.

## THE INDIVIDUAL AS A CHANNEL FOR THE GROUP: GROUP ROLES

In addition to the world being a channel for the individual, the individual can be a channel for the world. Information about unknown, emerging parts of a group can be transmitted through an individual. This is an important concept for this research. I am focusing here on group experiences, but I am doing so from the perspective of an individual whose interest in learning is not shared by the group. Although in consensus reality I am isolated in my organization, in Dreamland I am deeply involved in its processes. In this paper, I am exploring ways I can unfold my role as a channel for my group and how this can contribute to my and my organization's growth.

Group processes unfold through the interaction of a particular configuration of roles that belong to that group. Some of these roles are primary, better known, and others are secondary, less known. Groups can learn about themselves by drawing individuals in to occupy these roles. The individual's unique way of playing out a role can contribute to the group knowing itself. Behind the role is personal experience. When this experience is brought in, it awakens the group to aspects of itself. An individual can play out a role either externally, through interaction with other group members, or internally, through engaging with parts of herself that correspond to roles in the group. In this paper, I am working internally, using different World Work tools as templates, because this is the only option open to me for engaging with my organization's processes.

## RANK IN GROUPS

In working with role interactions internally, it is important to consider the rank relationships of the roles. Rank relationships operate in the background of all group processes. When people interact, some have more power and privilege than others, and there is a consensus to accept and even celebrate this inequality. This limits the amount of fluidity in a group's relations. Bringing awareness to rank differences contributes to a group learning about itself and enhances its fluidity. There are basically two kinds of rank. Some we are born with. These are unearned ranks. Other ranks we earn. Both kinds of rank bestow privileges in groups. The privileges of either kind of rank can be enjoyed without awareness. Unconsciousness of rank can lead to behavior that bullies or excludes others. This hurts our relations with those of lesser rank. We can bring our privileges into awareness and seek ways to share them or use them in a way that helps all parties.

### *Social Rank*

Social rank is an unearned rank. In consensus reality, it is generally accepted that men rate better salaries than women simply by virtue of having been born into male bodies, that lighter skin has more intrinsic merit than darker skin, that all wealthy people are entitled to be more respected and better treated than all people of less wealth, that those who fulfill norms of beauty deserve the special attention they receive, that people who express their sexuality in traditionally accepted ways are for that reason good and people who don't are bad – society has a long list of trumped up excuses for ranking some individuals over others. Those born into any of the consensually dominant categories did nothing to earn the accompanying power and privileges.

Social rank is a central issue in World Work workshops, with participants from all over the world. However, it will not be an important topic in this research. Here, social rank appears mainly as a secondary process complicating my agency's a primary process commitment to equal opportunity in the workplace. The persistence in my organization of isms that rank individuals in the larger society has inspired special protection efforts in the form of crony networks. These networks are an important part of my story as a World Work alumnus in my organization.

### Contextual Rank

Contextual Rank is rank that belongs to a specific context. Inside the larger culture, particular groups rank individuals in ways that are unique to that group. Anyone who shares the values of their organization has what Process Work calls contextual rank. In addition, anyone familiar with an organization has contextual rank, and newcomers or outsiders, who are unfamiliar, lack this rank: knowledge is power. Contextual rank can be unearned or earned, or some combination of the two. A newcomer to a particular field can apply herself to learning its ways or to developing herself in areas valued by that group and by those efforts acquire contextual rank. In Child Protection services, high position on a rigidly defined chain of command is respected. Staffs that are knowledgeable about policy are taken more seriously. Persons with warm dispositions who organize birthday parties for other staff are more popular and less likely to be left out of the loop.

Contextual rank will be a focus in this paper. The agency studied here is a publicly funded bureaucracy and, as such has no customers with whom it needs to maintain good relations. In addition, as a Child Protection bureaucracy, it has developed secretive tendencies to protect itself from unfriendly scrutiny by the larger society. As a result, the public is ignorant of its workings and lacks contextual rank. This public includes the families my department serves. My agency is unaware of the ways this rank imbalance gives it unfair advantage over its client families. As discussed earlier, this is perhaps the single greatest problem keeping Child Protection work from fulfilling its mission.

In addition, there are many contextual rank issues within my department, and the department also resists becoming aware of them. The culture of Child Protection is an intricate dance of competition for power between groups that possess different kinds of contextual rank or insider status. These contests for power will be studied in detail later, especially the conflict between persons knowledgeable about their work and insiders in a crony network.

### Psychological Rank

Psychological rank is gained through surviving personal suffering. It is a power related to the self-knowledge gained from being tested. This rank can also come from receiving the psychological support of wise and loving parents. In that sense, it has aspects that are earned and aspects that are unearned. It is like educational rank, earned in that it is

the fruit of self-application, but unearned in that it may also come from being raised in an educated family or receiving family support (emotional and financial) to pursue an education.

### *Spiritual Rank*

Spiritual rank is also classed as an earned and an unearned rank. Whereas psychological rank is a power that is developed by individual effort and that resides in an individual, spiritual rank comes from finding a connection with some greater power, transcending the limited capacities of any individual. Different religions disagree on the extent to which this form of rank is earned or unearned. Some Christian denominations, for example, say it comes from faith, while others say it comes from works. Some describe it simply as a gift of grace. However, to the extent that it is unearned, it differs from unearned social and contextual rank in that it is not a gift from a society or a group. A person who belongs to the dominant religion in a culture will have social rank from that fact, but they may or may not have spiritual rank.

World Work develops the psychological and spiritual rank that participants bring to participating in groups. A goal of this research is to help me integrate this rank training. Through this, I hope to increase my psychological and spiritual rank in my department so that I can make an impact on my organization or at least withstand being overpowered by forces with greater contextual rank.

## THE COMPLEXITIES OF RANK

These ratings exert a powerful influence on relationships and group interactions, but important parts of this influence are unconscious. Take an example from this study, my relationship with my supervisor. Simply by virtue of her position in the chain of command, she has contextual rank in the organization. However, she is also an African American woman supervising a white man. How comfortable is she supervising someone with greater social rank, and how will this play out in our relationship? I have a master's degree in clinical psychology and a professional license and she does not. How do these educational rank issues influence our relating? She and I work for the Family Group Decision Making program, and I have been working in this program for three years longer than she. In

addition, my World Work studies have prepared me spiritually to do the work of this program. I have contextual and spiritual rank in this program. World Work teaches participants to develop awareness to negotiate this kind of complex rank configuration. These relationships shift as they are brought to awareness in a World Work training, and the resulting fluidity adds another level of complexity.

## RANK AWARENESS

Although each of us has a unique inner sense of our own rank that is determined by a variety of factors, most of us are more aware of the areas in which we feel we lack rank and less aware of areas where we are full of rank. There is a consensus to tolerate individuals of high rank to ignore their rank, as one of the privileges of having that rank. This is a major cause of rank's unconscious influence on group processes.

However, although we hide our areas of high rank from ourselves, we can't hide them from others. They recognize and respond to our rank because of our signals and communication styles. We can communicate high rank through a variety of signals that express comfort in a situation. Maintaining a calm demeanor while others are becoming excited is often a signal of rank. Being shown greater deference by a group and appearing to take that for granted is another. Taking the lead in communicating or controlling any aspect of a relationship indicates high rank. When other's react to these signals, it results in a discrepancy between our sense of our rank and others' sense of it, whereby others have a higher sense of our rank than we do. In addition, these others respond to us as though we were aware of the rank communicated by our signals. They do not take into account that we are hiding our areas of high rank from ourselves. This creates two layers of discrepancy:

- a discrepancy in our and other's estimation of our rank, and
- a discrepancy in the awareness that we and other's have of our rank signals.

This double discrepancy creates tension and misunderstanding in our relationships with others. They can feel anger toward us because of our unconscious expression of our disowned rank.



## DEEP DEMOCRACY

When group members become aware of their rank imbalances, the result is a fuller and more self-aware expression of the group. This is part of what Mindell calls Deep Democracy. This paper is a search for ways to develop this quality. In the typical expression of democracy found in consensus reality the majority rules. While this is superior to a group where many are dominated by a few, it is still a group in which one part always dominates another part. It has a tendency to become fixed in its power relations and the way its parts relate to each other. In contrast, in a Deep Democracy there is a fluid, constantly shifting relationship between all the parts. Each part, even the smallest or the least powerful, can, in the appropriate moment, have its chance to lead the whole.

Deep Democracy has another dimension as well. In addition to giving equal attention to all participants, it is also equally receptive to all styles of communication and all states of consciousness. To give an example of how this value could be expressed in the kind of business we are studying here, Deep Democracy does not privilege rational, emotionally controlled discourse of the kind that is typically called “professional” business communication. Very personal, highly emotional expression is also supported. Developing this inclusiveness further, sharing does not have to be in words only. It can be through sound or movement, or through someone connecting deeply with herself and communicating what she is feeling simply through her presence. The configuration of subgroups can be a communication to which the facilitator could draw to the participants’ attention. In addition, a linear style is not preferred over a non-linear one. The progression of events in a workshop does not have to conform to consensus reality time or space in order for it to be meaningful to the group. Deeply touching events can occur following a dreamlike logic, or the group can have an experience together that transcends normal boundaries, occurring simultaneously inside and around everyone. Any one of these atypical states or styles of communication can be introduced to the group, when the moment is right, by any participant.

## THE STAGES OF A GROUP PROCESS:

World Work has developed a set of tools to enable a group to learn about itself. Some of these tools form the basis for the inner work explorations in the chapters that follow,

and they are described here. I will only discuss those stages that are relevant to my study. Other stages that Process Work has identified will be mentioned here but not described.

### *Feeling the Atmosphere*

The first World Work tool for unfolding that process is sensing the atmosphere. Atmosphere is something that one often responds to without any awareness that one is doing so. The atmosphere created by a group is like the impression one has on meeting a person for the first time. Developing awareness of atmosphere can be a valuable step in participating in a group field. In this paper I will do inner work to become more conscious of the atmospheres created by different group processes in my department.

### *Picking up on Conversations*

Another way I may be drawn into an atmosphere is by hearing the typical talk in a particular social field. All groups have stereotypical conversations repeated over and over that draw the listener in more by their music than by their content. Later in this paper, I will study these conversations to learn more about certain group processes in my organization.

### *Sorting*

During the sorting process a group explores which aspects of itself it is interested in focusing on and learning about. World Work workshops have around three hundred participants from around twenty countries. There are always many more topics in the air than the group can focus on. Sometimes the group's facilitators will use their awareness of the group to identify a topic for the group to explore. Other times, the group applies the World Work value of deep democracy and together decides on a topic. In this paper, I will select three topics that appear to offer the best opportunity to learn about my group

### *Identifying Roles*

The atmosphere and gossip in a group give a sense of the particular roles whose interaction structures the social field. Identifying these roles and then doing a structural analysis of which ones are primary and which secondary to the group's sense of itself are tools that can help one become more aware of a field. It can also be helpful to study the rank relationships between these roles. These tools will be used in this paper to develop my exploration into my organization.

*Role Switching, Representing Ghost Roles,*

*Watching for Edges and Hotspots*

These are tools used in group processing to unfold roles and develop awareness of the group. They will not be explored in this paper. Perhaps another Process Worker will be inspired to look for ways to adapt them to inner work,

**FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING  
CONCEPTS AND TOOLS**

## **FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING CONCEPTS AND TOOLS**

Having discussed the concepts and tools of Process Work and World Work, I next want to describe a new social work tool that takes a very similar approach. Family Group Decision Making, a meeting between professionals and all persons who have a stake in the well-being of a child, seeks to empower families to participate as equals with professionals in the work of protecting children. It brings in a version of Deep Democracy that corrects the marginalization of client families by taking following steps:

- Every effort is made to make the meeting feel, in the words of one prominent spokesperson, like “a family meeting to which professionals have been invited, rather than a meeting of professionals to which the family has been invited.” Meetings are held in the community, in locations convenient to the families, rather than in an office of the department. This location may be the family home itself (especially if a key family member is physically challenged from leaving the home) a community venue, like a church, that is meaningful to the family, or (if necessary to avoid the appearance of favoring one side of the family over another) a neutral community setting like a library. Meetings are held on Child Protective Services agency sites only as a last resort. In addition, meetings are scheduled at times convenient for the families, including evenings or weekends, if necessary, rather than scheduling them during the agency’s normal working hours. The family is encouraged to prepare a meal for themselves, one appropriate to their family culture, and to eat it at a designated time in the meeting to celebrate their coming together on behalf of the children. The family is the host at this meal, and the professionals are guests. At the beginning of the meeting, the family is invited to say a prayer appropriate to their culture. Through these steps, client families, which have traditionally been marginalized in the system of Child Protection work, become central to the process. This role reversal moves in the direction of a fluid state where family and agency alternate in having a voice in shaping a plan to heal the family.
  
- There is as a strong emphasis on including as many family and community support persons as possible in the meeting. The family and community (not the professionals) are recognized to be the experts on themselves, and every effort is made to bring in as much of their expertise as possible. In addition, it is believed that families are

empowered and helped to feel that the meeting is theirs, not the agencies, if they outnumber the professionals at the meeting. These steps express a deep understanding of conditions that contribute to a subgroup experiencing either centrality or marginality within the larger group.

- With families that are not fluent English speakers, a special effort is made to hold the conference in the primary language of the family group. Even with English speakers, the professionals attempt to attune themselves to the family and community's unique style of communication. Professional jargon is avoided during a meeting.
- Time and effort are invested to ensure that the family and community support persons have the preparation they need to share their perspective as equals to the professionals in a meeting format that is unfamiliar to them. This is done through phone conversations or visits with family members in their homes during which the structure and goals of a Family Group Decision Making conference are discussed in detail. These steps expresses a sensitivity to the factors that contribute to a subgroup having or lacking contextual rank.

When these meetings succeed, Child Protection professionals experience a deep shift in their understanding of their work. Agency staffs are privileged to be taught by families and communities all the different ways that ordinary people, rather than, professionals, accomplish the task of keeping children safe and well cared for. There are also many opportunities for agency staff to learn from their clients about the different ways that department procedures get in the way of a family healing itself.

Family Group Decision Making has gone a long way toward actualizing many of the changes I had hoped for when I daydreamed about my organization taking part in a World Work workshop. This new social work tool is committed to creating a context where all interested parties can express themselves fully on an issue. It also challenges professionals to become sensitive to the power that they have over non-professionals.

However, as a revolutionary change, it has had mixed reception in my agency. The experience of a family conference can be an inspiring revelation to some staffs, but for others it can be a disorienting and embarrassing experience. Meetings often result in an improved

relationship between the family and the agency, but the social worker or her supervisor may experience this as exposing the fact that they did not have as good a relationship with the client family as she thought they had. Similarly, when information is brought forth in a meeting that is new to agency staff, maybe to the point of forcing the agency to significantly revise its approach to a family, this may be felt by the worker as a criticism of her assessment skills. Managers can also be challenged in a way that makes them uncomfortable. They may see the necessity of policy changes that they do not have the authority to undertake. Always, a family conference shows agency staffs the need to develop whole new skill sets for doing Child Protective work, and this challenge is threatening to some. Family Group Decision Making gives centrality to the previously marginalized family, but this is only one step toward developing a deep democracy that equally values every voice. The final goal is a fluid interaction in which all roles move back and forth between central and marginal and any role can have an opportunity to lead at the appropriate time.

Family Group Decision Making has not fully achieved this state in my organization. Stuck in the stage of advocating for more centrality for families, it has alienated staff and contributed to a backlash, provoking some parts of my organization to defend themselves even more vigorously against awareness. As a result, it has both supported my struggle to bring my World Work learning into my organization and seriously complicated this struggle. This added complexity has challenged me to look for ways to provide more focused attention to the task of integrating my World Work learning. I will describe this in more detail in the following chapters.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE NARRATOR'S POINT OF VIEW



## REFLECTIONS ON THE NARRATOR'S POINT OF VIEW

This paper records my journey toward awareness of my organization. By the time I completed the study on which it is based, I had learned how to access a balanced view of my agency's operations. Although I continue to experience *high dream* and *low dream* states, alternating bouts of infatuation with the possibilities of Child Protection work and depression when these possibilities are not realized, I am also sometimes able to hold a view that is neither in love nor out of love yet still loving, a *no dream* state. However, the first seventy-five pages of this paper often fail to present this balanced attitude. Instead, I often focus on problems faced by a staff person at the bottom of the chain of command. Because this approach may appear to some readers to be more appropriate for a social activist than for a facilitator of World Work group processes, I want to explain here the different reasons for the frequent one-sided approach of some parts of this paper.

First, the experiences, feelings, and ideas of line staff in my organization are ignored to such a point that giving them special attention appeared a necessary step toward presenting a balanced view. In World Work training a facilitator might make the same strategic move while working with a group. One way World Work achieves equal representation for all viewpoints is by sometimes giving extra attention to a part marginalized by the whole. In special circumstances, a facilitator will temporarily leave his role, asking another to hold it, so that he can fill a role that is not being sufficiently represented. Because the perspective of line staff in my organization is routinely ignored, I have decided to give special attention to this perspective.

Second, the sometimes difficult re-entry experiences of World Work alumni are not at this point being addressed by the Process Work learning community. As a result, these experiences are marginalized both by the organization to which the alumni returns and by Process Work. This paper seeks to contribute to Process Work by addressing this lack in the hopes of inspiring Process Work teachers to develop techniques that help alumni integrate their experience. The sections of this paper where I candidly discuss my failures in integrating my learning are as important as the sections reporting my limited successes using Process Work and World Work tools. My journaling is an invitation to other World Work alumni to share their re-entry experiences.

There is another reason for the activist tone of some of this writing. The child protection organization to which I returned following World Work was in the midst of a revolution as a result of convening Family Group Decision Making conferences where families participate as equals with social work professionals. On principle, these meetings are deeply democratic, but the movement for change they represent polarizes with those parts of the agency that want to persist in the old way of doing business. Although Family Group Decision Making expresses a deeply democratic attitude inside a family conference, other times it has an activist attitude advocating change and challenging traditional approaches to child protective work. Because I work for this program and am committed to its goals, there are parts of this paper where it's activism combines with a *low dream* state in me to produce a polarized attitude.

Finally, my personal development is at this time in my life asking me to pay more attention to my failures in groups. Historically, I have tended to marginalize these negative experiences. I have sometimes taken on the group's troubles as personal issues to be resolved by working on myself. Behind this pattern is a *high dream* that says, if I could only become clear enough, I could make an impact on large group problems. Other times, I have exaggerated the importance of my limited successes in achieving a detached, balanced awareness. I have fallen in love with my success and ignored information that my and the group's problems had not been fully resolved. I have gotten stuck in a *high dream* attitude. Internalizing, the first pattern, would leave me stressed out and sometimes ill. The second pattern, inflating success, would leave me disoriented and vulnerable to destructive currents in my situation. During my present research, I have attempted to achieve a *no dream* state that truly includes positive and negative aspects. Such a state is not always the happiest state, but it offers protection from the vulnerability that a naïve *high dream* state can lead to. In order to develop this state, I have needed to become more familiar with *low dream*.

In the previous chapters, I have provided information about concepts and tools that underlie my approach. In this section, I have shared how my approach has been influenced by my personal psychology. This completes my introduction to this study. In the next section, I will record my efforts to bring awareness to my organization's group processes.

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## **PRELUDE: SOME VIEWS OF MY ORGANIZATION**

When I began this research project, I had been an alumnus of World Work workshops for eight years. During this time, a natural impulse to integrate my learning had guided me to modify the way I participated in my work setting. I imagine that many other World Work returnees have experienced similar shifts of involvement with their jobs. However, as time went on, changing circumstances demanded that I do more than informally modify my approach to my work. I was challenged to radically transform myself. This research was undertaken in response to this challenge.

Later in this paper, I will describe experiments with new applications of Process Work and World Work tools that respond to on-the-job challenges by passing through dreamlike states not ordinarily associated with the world of work. Sometimes, I will explore views of my organization that would be incomprehensible to most of my co-workers. As a prelude to this journey through altered states, I want to present how staff persons and the wider public perceive my organization while in everyday states of consciousness.

## **VIEWS OF MY BUREAUCRACY**

The public views my organization first as a publicly funded bureaucracy. Being publicly funded, it is not responsible for making a profit. There is no financial success or lack of success by which it can be evaluated. This leads to the public questioning how their taxpayer dollars are being spent. There is a stereotypical view of bureaucracies in the wider society that characterizes them as inefficient, staffed by people lacking a work ethic. People do not get fired from bureaucracies. On rare occasions, staffs resign, but retirement or death creates most vacancies. In addition, promotions appear to be determined by mysterious factors not related to work performance. Society's perception is that publicly funded bureaucracies lack a role that objectively evaluates either the work performance of individuals or the degree to which the organization as a whole is efficiently fulfilling its mission. As a result, news media and politicians take on the role

of evaluator. Awareness of my organization typically takes the form of outsiders exposing failures and supporting measures to cut back funding and weed out bad workers.

This study about developing awareness in groups thus begins with a paradox: one of the defining characteristics of the group I am studying is that it is widely perceived as in some sense deficient in self-awareness. Probably most consensus reality business organizations would seem lacking in self-awareness compared with a World Work workshop. After all, they have not come together primarily to develop self awareness; they have come together to do some kind of work. However, even among consensus reality businesses, bureaucracies have a special reputation for not evaluating themselves objectively. Instead of a vibrant, constantly shifting focus on themselves, sometimes self-affirming but other times self-critical, bureaucracies seem to have rigidly fixed ways of viewing themselves.

## MY BUREAUCRACY'S OFFICIAL VIEW OF ITSELF

The official view bureaucracies have of themselves is that they are very logically ordered, with policies and procedures governing every interaction, even the most trivial, and very strict in observing the chain of command. Bureaucracies like to think of themselves as having banished unfairness and other messy personnel issues by insuring that the work performance of all staff conforms to the same very detailed rules. Rigid rules also standardize working relationships and are used to contain interpersonal conflicts. Bureaucracies have a *high dream* of themselves as being fair and responsible, in an impersonal way, to their staff and to the clients they serve. Personalities don't influence their operations, and there is therefore nothing on this level that anyone needs to become more aware of.

## STAFFS' VIEW OF OUR BUREAUCRACY

Staff within this highly regulated environment view themselves in still another way, as participating in an organizational culture that is less like a business and more like

a very large extended family or one of those small towns that no one ever leaves. This culture has its own rules for relating, distinct from the policies that officially govern the organization. There is a strong emphasis on conformity in thinking and harmony in relating: “going along to get along.” New hires being trained are commonly warned not to make any enemies: you never know when that person will come into your life again, and in what capacity. They are encouraged to cultivate a network of friends and develop personal connections to keep them up-to-date on other work opportunities within the organization, in case their current assignment does not work out for any reason. Staffs, even those who have had serious disagreements, are tenderly protective of each other's rights in matters like sick leave or payment for overtime and will remind each other to pursue these rights. Funerals, of coworkers or even family members of coworkers, are given elaborate recognition, collections taken up, flowers and sympathy cards purchased. Staffs have a *high dream* of themselves as behaving caringly toward each other, inspired by a need to band together against an oppressive management.

## THE VIEW OF MY BUREAUCRACY PRESENTED IN ITS GOSSIP

In contrast to the impersonal dryness of a bureaucracy's official view of its operations and the bland, generalized sweetness of staffs' view of their customs, the gossip within a bureaucracy tells vivid and very rough tales evoking an unfair, uncaring world. The view that gossip presents is more complex than the others. For example, it can vacillate without warning from being positive to being negative, or it can be both at the same times. Sometimes, *in a high dream mode*, it celebrates the special bonds of friendship that can develop in an unsupportive environment. However, the same piece of gossip about a friendship, told from a different person's perspective, can become a *low dream* expression if it depicts this friendship as being part of a crony network that enjoys unfair advantage over other staffs in the organization.

The gossip about my current supervisor is an example. For years, she has enjoyed a close friendship with the woman who assigned her to oversee my work. I imagine they and their friends celebrate the support they as African American women give each other in the workplace. However, I have not benefited from this support. My

progress integrating my World Work learning into my work in my agency suffered a major setback when management assigned her to oversee my work. This development was not communicated to me in as a rationally developed management decision coming from the world of policy. Nor was it shared from the familial culture, with the warm hope that the new arrangement would contribute to a more harmonious working situation for all. Instead, it was told to me in secret, as emotionally charged gossip, several days before I learned of it through more official channels. For the entire time that I have worked with this supervisor, our relationship has been immersed in currents of controversy, discussed, commented on, and analyzed in heated behind-the-scenes conversations which everyone understood needed to be kept secret from certain other people in the organization.

Although I had strong feelings about this very difficult relationship, it often seemed that bystanders had even stronger feelings. Their commentary had a life of its own: it was about more than my personal dilemma. Gossip is a survival strategy for members of a group that has a limited or idealized view of itself. It seems to be aimed at helping people vent their frustrations, disappointment, jealousies, fears and the like, but a deeper goal is to find an authentic awareness of the real operations of the group. In a bureaucracy, an organization which is deficient in self-evaluation, gossip becomes an underground expression of this evaluation function. Sometimes, it carries out its speculations through projecting its issues onto certain individuals or relationships. My relationship with my supervisor was an example of this. Even before it was officially announced or known to me, it had established itself as a pretext for many people to argue the philosophical question of the authority that a supervisor has over a supervisee. Did the rank that the situation conferred on a supervisor mean that she had absolute authority over all her supervisee's actions? What if she appeared to lack the personal qualifications to exercise her authority?

## DIFFERENT VIEWS OF MY BUREAUCRACY NOT COMING TOGETHER

These three views of a bureaucracy, dryly rational, sweetly caring, and vividly caricatured, exist as parallel worlds in the experience of staff in my organization, each

presenting a different aspect of the workings of a bureaucracy. They never come together into one coherent experience, shared by everyone. Instead, each individual staff person constructs his own unique combination of these views according to her individual psychology. Some bureaucrats identify with the logical, impartial world constricted by official policy. To them, expressions of caring are a side issue, and gossip represents a rebellious element that threatens to disrupt the orderliness of their world. Other bureaucrats identify with the sweetness of a familial staff culture. To them, the orderliness of policy represents a coldly rigid element that threatens to disrupt the interpersonal caring they value, and the raucous vividness of gossip as rude and hurtful. Finally, there are bureaucrats who identify with the unvarnished truthfulness of the agency's gossip. They experience the impartiality of policy as a sham and the caring sweetness of their colleagues as a cover-up of unresolved conflicts. The important point is that there is no shared awareness that could serve as the basis for all staffs experiencing themselves as a group. Thus there is no possibility of a dialogue between a bureaucracy and the wider public.

## IEWS OF MY CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES BUREAUCRACY

The particular bureaucracy I work for has the mission to protect children from abuse or neglect occurring within their families. As such, it has a more complex relationship with its clients than most other bureaucracies, and a more highly charged relationship with society as a whole. Protecting children has become an almost hysterical public concern. Anyone familiar with the American news media knows that lurid stories of child abuse appear constantly there, and equally lurid stories appear when the department acts in a way that society perceives as harming families. The public appears to be highly ambivalent about the State intervening in the lives of families to protect children. People in the community are outraged when vulnerable children are harmed, but at the same time they dread the thought of the department becoming involved with their family. Added to the contempt that people have toward bureaucrats in general is a fear of the Child Protection worker. On one hand, the public expects Child Protective Service agencies to have a fix for every problem affecting children; on the other hand, it



thinks these agencies have far too much power over families, power which it often exerts to their detriment.

The public criticizes the actions of Child Protection Services from so many angles that it often seems to agency staff that they can't do anything right. This intense, conflicted view of Child Protection work is represented in the following newspaper pieces. The first criticizes a disastrous failure to take a child out of his parents' home:

Family and friends will gather today at Courthouse Park for a prayer vigil for Marine Lance Cpl. Robert Quiroz. It will be the eve of a preliminary hearing in which a judge decides whether he should face trial for murdering his infant son, Roman. We wish a formal inquiry was also pending for Fresno County's Child Protective Services. Good intentions from a lot of people clearly surrounded this little boy, but yet we've again lost a precious child. Fresno County residents must question why this safety net agency isn't living up to its name.

Why has the system failed? The county got involved with Roman when he turned up at Children's Hospital Central California with a broken arm, an injury suspicious enough to draw the attention of a doctor and social worker. At that point, the system stepped in and had an opportunity to determine what, exactly, had happened to this child before sending him back into his home. It didn't happen. About a month after authorities were alerted to Roman's broken arm, the child was dead. He had a fractured skull and broken ribs.

The county scurried to analyze its part in the tragedy and put new practices in place.... New policies are all well and good, but CPS workers didn't follow the policies already in place. You can fill an encyclopedia with policies, but if they are not followed, children are still being placed at risk.

The people we rely on to fight for Roman's safety appeared to have more compassion for the grieving father and his family than for this helpless child. It's questionable whether the county is up to the task of protecting children. ...these problems run deeper than this child's death. It's time for the Board of Supervisors to fix a CPS system that seems incapable of protecting children. (1)

This article does not give constructive input to Child Protective Services. Its tone is highly emotional and condemning. It belittles the agency's efforts to learn from this incident with the statement "The County scurried to analyze its part in the tragedy and put new practices in place." A more serious problem is its one-sided approach. Implicitly, by its tone and its arrangement of the facts of the case, it demonizes bad parents and aggressively advocates for removing children from their homes. It begins with a description of a prayer vigil for the father held by family and friends and later goes on to state "The people we rely on to fight for Roman's safety appeared to have more

compassion for the grieving father and his family than for this helpless child.” Bringing in the father in this way indirectly attacks any social work agency that would even consider leaving a child in his home. It simplifies a decision that is complex and difficult and requires a subtle judgment.

The next news article is an equally one-sided attack on taking a child out of his home and placing him with foster parents:

A Superior Court jury on Tuesday ordered the state to pay \$6.2 million to four siblings who were repeatedly abused in foster care for six years. The multimillion dollar award is simply the latest in a string of legal troubles for the state Department of Social and Health Services.

When will the Governor, the DSHS Secretary, and the Children’s Administration director realize the foster care system is fundamentally flawed in this state? They and the Legislature have thrown millions of dollars at the system and hired hundreds of workers in the last couple of years, but the horrors continue to grab headlines:

- In February, three former and current foster children filed \$45 million in claims against the state, saying their former foster father never should have been licensed. The case made headlines last summer, when it was revealed that the caretaker was trusted with foster children despite a long list of unresolved sexual abuse complaints and a documented criminal history. The children say he subjected them to severe abuse in his home. Between 1997 and February 2006, the state received nearly 30 allegations of abuse relating to foster children in his home. Yet the children were not removed from there until the Police Department investigated and arrested him last year.
- In January a DSHS report had foster-care advocates threatening a lawsuit and the department defending its efforts to improve the foster care system. The report was required by a landmark lawsuit that was filed in 1998 on behalf of 13 foster children who sued the state for bouncing them around foster homes without adequate services. The state settled this case in August 2004 by promising to make dozens of specific improvements, from more mental health treatment for kids to better training for foster parents. The agreement’s blueprint for changing the system runs for about seven years. Yet lawyers for the original lawsuit’s plaintiffs said the department has failed to reach statistical benchmarks it was supposed to have met.
- Last month, the state agreed to pay \$290,000 to settle a lawsuit accusing the state of negligence in the case of an 8-year-old foster child sexually abused at a foster home in 2002.
- In April, a multimillion-dollar lawsuit blamed state social workers for ignoring warnings that could have avoided abuse that left a 6-year-old girl brain damaged and partially blind.

These are just recent developments. The toll also includes the death of seven children under the state's watch from 2003 to 2006. When will the litany of death and abuse stop? In the case of the \$6.2 million jury award, the attorney for the abused children, Becky Roe, said she had never seen a group of children who so badly slipped through the system's cracks. She said the verdict sends a simple message to DSHS: "Get your act together." Good advice. Are the governor and two DSHS administrators paying attention? (2)

Like the previous article, this piece does not give constructive input to Child Protection Services. Instead, it criticizes the handling of several cases in a way that adds up to a blanket attack against placing children in foster homes. It does not acknowledge that problems with foster care are widely recognized in Child Protection work and are important reasons that the department is conservative in using the option of foster placement. The decision to take a child from its parents and place it in foster care always involves weighing two risks: the risk to a child remaining in a home where poor parenting has been demonstrated and the risk to a child placed with strangers. If this article had been published along with the previous article as part of a series exploring the problematic choices available to my department, it could have stimulated a public discussion of the many challenges of Child Protection work. Instead, it makes a narrowly focused attack on one of the choices available to the department. Together with the previous article, it contributes to an environment of opinion in which Child Protection workers suffer from being buffeted by conflicting one-sided demands.

After my department decides to take a child out of his parent's care, it faces new decisions about where to place him. The media criticizes my agency in this area as well. As with the above articles, the following piece attacks a particular placement decision instead of opening up a discussion about the complexities of this decision-making process:

Morris Brasovankin had the photo album tucked under his arm, the blue album with the lace edging, the one with the snapshots of the grandson he so desperately wants to bring home. "It's baby pictures," he said with a wan smile -- photos that show how involved he and his wife have been with 5-year-old Steven all of his life. Brasovankin brought the album yesterday to show to the Family Court judge who took Steven away, hoping she'd reconsider and send him home to Pop-pop and Bubby after six weeks in foster care. He never got the chance. For the second time in as many months, the hearing had to be continued -- this time, until Sept. 11 -- because a key participant couldn't attend. Bad enough that the Brasovankins were deemed too old to care for Steven -- they're in their 80s. Now the anguished couple

can't even get a day in court to prove otherwise. Not that there's much to prove: Studies repeatedly show that a child is better off with family than in foster care. And yet Steven was removed from the Brasovankins' home and placed with strangers in what seems to me an outrageous case of age discrimination. And while the grandparents suffer bitterly and the child is rootless -- he's been moved to another placement while his foster family is on vacation! -- the court compounds the travesty with outrageous delay.

Steven's life has been tumultuous. "He had a very tough beginning and a very tough childhood and we've always been there for him," Mildred said. "And of late, we've been there for him day and night for five months." That was fine with the Department of Human Services, which gave the couple temporary custody in February after their son began acting erratically. But their lives were upended when a month later, Family Court Judge Ann Butchart -- on the advice of a child advocate who said the grandparents couldn't meet Steven's needs -- ordered him put into foster care....

Sure, the couple is frail. Sure, their life expectancy is short. She walks with the help of a cane. He's slightly hunched. So, how about providing them support at home? How about working with them on eventual transition plans for Steven? They provide love and stability to a child who needs it desperately. Not to mention that research shows foster care is traumatic. According to a July 3 report in USA Today, studies show that "the 500,000 children in U.S. foster care are more likely than other kids to drop out of school, commit crimes, abuse drugs and become teen parents." That's true, the story said, "even when foster kids are compared with other disadvantaged youth."

In light of that, it's inexplicable that a judge and a child advocate decided Steven would be better off with strangers. At the end of the brief hearing yesterday, a crestfallen Morris Brasovankin walked away, the unopened photo album under his arm. The pictures of Steven will have to do for now -- until justice and sanity hopefully prevail and he and his wife get their grandson back." (3)

Although this article cites some research, it does so only to support its position, not to lay the groundwork for a thoughtful discussion of the operations of Child Protection. The issue of placement with relatives versus placement in professional foster care has many facets that are left out of the argument. The article cites "the advice of a child advocate who said the grandparents couldn't meet Steven's needs," but it does not elaborate. Instead, this piece gives a sentimental presentation of the grandparents to support a simplistic case for placing children with relatives.

Unlike the previous articles, the next piece evokes the complexities of Child Protective work, but it does so in a way that faults the agency for failing to take into account the many relevant factors:

A Seal Beach woman who says social workers improperly wrested her two young daughters from her custody has won a \$4.9-million verdict against the Orange County Department of Social Services....

Deanna Fogarty-Hardwick, the mother, alleged in a lawsuit that in February 2000 social workers ‘intentionally misinformed the court that she told her children, who were 9 and 6, that their father was trying to take them away from her. Her lawyer, Shawn A. McMillan, said that led to the court’s decision to remove the children and place them in Orangewood Children’s Home for a month and for another two months in foster care. In the two years after that, he said, the children remained in the custody of their father, with monitored visits from Fogarty-Hardwick....

According to the lawsuit, social workers later failed to tell a judge that the children were emotionally distressed during their stay at the children’s home and in foster care, prolonging their separation from their mother. McMillan said a supervisor with the agency ruled against the children’s placement with relatives without legitimate grounds.

... last Friday the jury awarded damages against the social services agency and two social workers. Tuesday the jury awarded an additional \$5,900 in punitive damages, McMillan said. “They thought it was important to send a message to other social workers,” she said after talking with jurors. (4)

This article reports on a legal case about which the court has decided, which partly explains the black and white approach. However, this article could have taken this story as an opportunity to discuss the many factors that need to be considered in determining if a child can remain safely in her parents’ home or be returned home safely after being placed temporarily in foster care. Such a discussion could then have gone on to acknowledge the risk of losing some details, not recognizing their importance or, ironically, doing what the press typically does: exclude some of them in order to make a more compelling case. This approach would have provided a richer, more nuanced depiction of the work of Child Protection.

As these articles demonstrate, the default position of the media is to simplify issues and attack my department, not to invite a public discussion of the difficult operations of Child Protective Services. Over time, the buffeting delivered by this kind of conflicting critical feedback has demoralized staff in my department in a way that has detracted from their ability to fulfill the department’s mission. One prominent academic commentator on the current state of Child Protective work describes this situation in this way:

A multiplicity of factors contributes to people at all levels of the system being caught up in protecting themselves from a variety of criticisms, many of which conflict with one another. CPS is made to be "over responsible" to the point where the process is consumed with establishing guilt or blame.... Such contradictory views, practices, and practice conditions ill serve the need for carefully considered, reflective decision making required in these highly complex situations....

In the face of social workers and court personnel saying they are so overwhelmed that they don't have time to carefully reflect on their decision making, it seems incredible that we would then hope for quality outcomes to result from those decisions. All the ingredients of bad decision making would seem to prevail in such situations: limited availability of facts and resources at the moment they are needed; high outside pressure to make decisions; significant consequences if you get it wrong; an ever-changing often contradictory and politicized landscape of expectations for what constitutes the "correct answer.... (5)

In summary, an organization that functions like a large extended family, with its share of dysfunctional relationships, so lacking in a communally shared sense of itself and its mission that gossip is often the most prominent medium of communication, is in charge of a complex, sensitive, politically charged public mission. There is a widespread sense that it is failing, but this sense seems to come mainly from the outside. The organization does not have a coherent sense of itself that would enable it to answer its critics or construct its own objective criticism of itself. Lacking this, it has developed a tendency to defend itself against external challenges to become more aware.

## RESISTANCE TO AWARENESS IN CHILD PROTECTION WORK

My department defends itself from evaluation by both outsiders and insiders, as is shown in the following three documents. The first is an editorial:

The state of California cannot say how many foster children die each year, even though a state law that took effect in 2004 requires counties to release the names, dates of birth, and dates of death for these children. The new law is not being followed by all: The Children's Advocacy Institute requested the names for 2005 from all 58 counties. Nearly a year later, they're still waiting for two counties to respond.

The names that they do have for 2005 offer more questions than answers. What does it mean, for example, that nine of the deaths were children age 17 or older,

five of whom were within six weeks of their 18th birthday? Are 17-year-olds simply more likely to get in car accidents? Suffer drug overdoses? Skateboard without helmets? Or does it mean the fulfillment of our worst fears -- that some children, facing the harsh realities of homelessness and desperation when they "age out" of the system at 18, are taking their own lives instead?

"There's no way to get more information without going to the courts" said Christina Riehl, staff attorney for the Children's Advocacy Institute. There is absolutely no reason why an advocacy group, a newspaper, an elected official, or any other concerned member of the public should have to go to court to find out what happened when a foster youth dies. But due to California's baffling policies on disclosure, it's extraordinarily difficult for the public to learn who in the system is dying and why. Nearly every bill that has come through the Legislature in the past several years has been stonewalled by the County Welfare Directors' Association....

Confidentiality is important, especially when it comes to protecting the identities of family members and abuse reporters. We understand, as well, that it's important to protect the names of abused children who suffer near-fatalities but are expected to recover. But there are no good reasons why the full case files -- including names, counties and histories -- for dead foster children shouldn't be open to all of us. There can't be any accountability without transparency.

For some reason, there are still people who seem to believe that if we don't get the information, we won't pay attention to the fact that our children are dying. They're wrong.... What we don't know can hurt us. It's unconscionable to let children pay the price." (6)

Another news article complains about a Child Protective Services agency defending itself from oversight in a case we have previously read about, the case of the relatives deemed too old to care for their grandson:

It's outrageous enough that Mildred and Morris Brasovankin have lost the privilege of close, frequent contact with their 5-year-old grandson, Steven, with whom they've had a loving relationship since his birth. But, as of last week, they also have lost the right to comment on the legal proceedings that have caused their heartache, thanks to a gag order imposed by Family Court Judge Ann Butchart. Gee, what's the court going to take from this wonderful old couple next -- their right to cry over what's happened to them?

Butchart didn't return a call for comment, but Family Court Administrative Judge Kevin Dougherty told me that the gag order in the case is meant to protect the privacy of Steven and of his biological parents. But we already know an awful lot about this case. ... what's really going on with the gag order?

... I was left to speculate about the gag order with family-law attorney Lynne Gold-Bikin, [who told me] "I'm always suspicious when a judge issues a gag order, especially when the case involves something as outrageous as keeping grandparents

from seeing their grandchild....” In this case, “The gag order prevents anyone from second-guessing the judge's decisions. But if she believes in her decisions, what does she care what anyone says? It just looks odd, unfortunate and embarrassing.”

Dougherty said that, in general, gag orders are rare; in fact, he doesn't recall issuing one in his judicial career. Temple law professor Edward Ohlbaum says gag orders most often are issued in criminal cases to keep jurors from hearing information that, in a courtroom, would be considered inadmissible, unfairly prejudicial or inflammatory. "This seems unusual, given that there's no jury in the case," said Ohlbaum about the Brasovankin situation, hastening to add that there may be “various considerations, about which we know nothing, that motivated the judge to issue the gag ruling. Complicating matters is that, in Philly, outsiders are banned from Family Court proceedings (which is not the case in family courts elsewhere, by the way).

The ban's noble intent? To preserve family privacy. Its convenient fallout? Judicial decisions rarely are scrutinized publicly. Unless, of course, people like the Brasovankins and their lawyers bring them to the media's attention. Once you've told your story on "Good Morning America," the way the Brasovankins did before the gag order, the public scrutiny comes in spades. As well it should in this instance....

Given their age and frailties, I'm not saying the Brasovankins deserve to care for their grandson without guidance from the court. But given that their love for him has been the only constant in his short life, they deserve, at the very least, to speak their minds publicly about what is going on in his life right now.” (7)

This resistance of Child Protective agencies to the attempts of outside agencies to bring awareness to their operations is paralleled by a lack of support for workers within the organization developing awareness. A disgruntled former employee describes the situation in this way:

What this behemoth department does (directly and indirectly) is to capture staff into its web of work, needless work, overwork. The crises (real and bureaucratic) of the day/the unit/the office/the department move into the foreground. The longer employees stay, the less they can see beyond this chaotic foreground.

When any outside issue, law or concern forces its way into the consciousness of the DCFS world, it gets chewed up, swallowed and regurgitated to fit the dysfunctional DCFS paradigm. The end result is such ongoing dysfunction that it seems unable to right itself. I think the end result for the employees can be broken down into three categories: 1) those who continue to accept the paradigm either maliciously or blindly but are always unquestioning as they play the game; 2) those who see the game but have become trapped and stay, usually due to personal economics, but become depressed, dissociated; and 3) those who actually see the bigger picture of the world of child welfare or the world of social



commitment or whatever and stay connected to some larger community where they can view both worlds and maintain a healthier perspective. Category 1) people remain and fester; category 2) people die and category 3) people survive but I think they leave. (8)

This is the situation I encountered as a World Work alumnus, eager for opportunities to apply my learning about bringing awareness to group processes. My expansiveness collided with an organization in contraction. To summarize the analysis presented so far, being aware or evaluating are not activities that Child Protection bureaucracies do: they are actions that are done to them from the outside. This external awareness and evaluation take the form, first, of journalistic exposes that regularly scapegoat the agency. The agency's status as public scapegoat leads to politicized meddling into its operations by government agencies. Finally, lawsuits are filed against it by families or other public advocacy organizations. These are settled at great cost to the agency. This cost is a major piece of their operating budget.

## A PROCESS WORK STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THIS RESISTANCE TO AWARENESS

In all these instances, awareness is perceived by the agency defensively, as a force with a potential to harm or disrupt, not as a force that could provide useful guidance to develop new, more effective forms of action. The mission of Child Protective Services - to protect children and support their families - is being disturbed by another process, that of critical awareness. Both these processes could work together harmoniously in an expanded sense of mission for the agency but they are not doing so now. Using the tools of Process Work to organize this insight, we would say that the agency's primary process is protecting children and supporting families. A process that would objectively evaluate its success in this endeavor is secondary, seen as outside the identity of the department and disturbing that identity. This resistance to awareness has even become part of the culture governing relations within my agency, so that staffs also experience pressures that inhibit them from learning about the dynamics of their group. A staff person seeking to develop awareness becomes a disturbance to the group's sense of itself, someone who will disrupt operations of the department's operations.

## HOW RESISTING AWARENESS HARMS RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY

The worst aspect of this defensive posture toward feedback, whether from outside or the inside, is that it sets in motion a vicious circle that progressively brings greater and greater harm to the families the department has the mission of serving. The department develops a habit of always talking about its work as though it were addressing outside attacking agencies, even when staff are talking to client families and their supporting communities. Communications with families and their communities become inappropriately adversarial, which intimidates and disempowers them and leads to an approach to social work that harms, rather than helps them. A vicious circle is set in motion. The harm the agency does to families and communities reinforces the agency's negative image with the public, especially when the public is made aware that the agency is hiding information related to this harm. This provokes outside agencies to criticize and scapegoat Child Protective Services more vehemently, which in turn causes the agency to become more defensive and hide itself even more. This posture of resisting awareness and evaluation in turn leads Child protective Services to become even less sensitive to the public which leads to more intimidating, disempowering behavior which brings more harm to families, and on and on it goes.

Preoccupied by attacks from outside agencies to an extent that blinds it to the relationship it has established with families and communities, Child Protective Services appears to be tragically unaware of the extent to which these attacks are provoked by its poor service to the public.

.....

1) Editorial: "Protecting Children: County's System Fails All Too Often, With Tragic Consequences"

Date: Wednesday, March 21, 2007

Source: Fresno Bee (California)

2) Editorial: "Foster Care System Must Be Improved"

Date: Sunday, June 10, 2007

Source: The Olympian (Olympia, Washington)

- 3) “Child, Five, Needs Stability, Love, Not More Shuffling”  
Date: Wednesday, July 18, 2007  
Source: Philadelphia Daily News (Pennsylvania)  
Author: Jill Porter
  
- 4) “Mother Gets \$4.9 Million Award in Orange County Custody Case”  
Date: Wednesday March 28, 2007  
Source: Los Angeles Times  
Author: Christopher Goffard
  
- 5) “Advancing Innovations: Family Group Decision Making As Community-Centered Child and Family Work”  
By Gale Burford, PhD  
Protecting Children, Volume 16, number 3  
American Humane Association
  
- 6) Editorial: “On Foster Care Reform: Why Are These Children Dying?”  
Date: Sunday, December 3, 2006  
Source: The San Francisco Chronicle (California)
  
- 7) “Here’s a Court Order that Makes Me Gag”  
Date: Tuesday, September 18, 2007  
Source: Philadelphia Daily News (Pennsylvania)  
Author: Ronnie Polaczky
  
- 8) Personal e-mail communication

**chapter outline for  
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## MY HISTORY IN MY ORGANIZATION AS A WORLD WORK ALUMNUS

In this section, I want to share my personal history in the Child Protection bureaucracy I have just described. I have worked for my department for twenty years. Seventeen years ago, I began studying Process Work. Eleven years ago, I had my first experience of a World Work workshop, and since that time, I have participated in five World Works in total. For over a decade, I have been living in parallel worlds of World Work and Child Protective Services. Here, I will present the stages by which I came to use the focused inner work in this research project to integrate my World Work learning into my job experiences.

### ON-THE-JOB DAYDREAMING

Returning to my job after one of my World Work experiences was an experience of culture shock. Caught between two worlds and longing to bring them closer together, my first reaction was to indulge in idealistic dreams of what it would be like if my department were to take part in a World Work workshop – a *high dream*. I would make unfavorable comparisons between World Work and the way my department actually functions – a *low dream* state. During this time, I swung back and forth between these two states without ever progressing in a *no dream* state.

I had experienced new ways of relating that were journeys of discovery and it was jarring to return to a culture of relationships narrowly focused on task. Filled with enthusiasm about group interaction, I believed it would improve our work if we shared more about what we were experiencing and feeling. I was too outspoken; I brought in too many feelings; I responded to parts of my coworkers (outside their professional identities) that I was supposed to ignore in a work setting; I tried to initiate conversations about intuitions or other subtleties of our authentic reactions to our clients, beyond what we put in our records. I was too much for my coworkers and they defended themselves by ignoring much of what I said. In retrospect, I can understand their reactions, but at the time I was hurt by it. My coworkers gave me the feeling that they experienced my new ways of interacting as lapses in professionalism that made them uncomfortable. They responded to my spontaneous

outbursts with stereotypical statements reiterating commonly accepted case plan approaches. I was constantly disappointed by the lack of original thinking and constructive debate about the important and difficult work we were doing.

When any of my overtures was rejected I felt a contradictory combination of feelings: euphoric at being able to re-enact some memory of World Work interacting, but at the same time frustrated, and isolated in my euphoria and haunted by the apprehension that my actions were putting my work relations and my professional reputation at risk. I could not help contrasting this to World Work, where every viewpoint is valued for what it can contribute to the group's learning about itself. Persons or subgroups that appear to be challenging the larger group's sense of identity are especially valued. Special efforts are made to give them the time and attention they need to fully explore and express their views. In this way, the group is invited to open up to new ways of viewing itself. Valuable insights can come from any participant.

If my department took part in a World Work workshop, all levels of management and staff would be welcomed and equally supported to express themselves and interact with each other. Persons from outside the department, client families, their communities and the department's critics would also be welcomed. In this space of democratically including all sides, the Child Protection agency would be invited to let down its defenses and engage with the feedback of the outside world. It would be challenged to open up to their criticisms, even to the point of taking their position and unfolding their views further. In the process, it would discover its own talent for awareness and evaluation, and it would learn that many staff persons in the Child Protection system have insights and potentially useful criticisms about the working of the department. It would learn that critical intelligence isn't only a force from the outside. The department might even be empowered to criticize its critics, demanding for example that journalists look at how they project their and the larger society's shadow material when they scapegoat Child Protection Services.

This is an inspiring dream. However, looking around my department for this kind of vibrant, creative shared learning experience, I saw instead, with new clarity, the rules in the background that help my organization's mainstream culture manage group interactions. I discovered that certain words, certain ways of speaking, and certain roles are preferred over others. Accepted professional communication in Child Protective Services is full of jargon.

The legalistic term visitation, for example, is preferred over the more normal word visit, even when talking with families. This word choice appears to be part of a mind set that evaluates whether a child-parent visit complies with court orders instead of appreciating it as a human interaction that helps heal a family. The unconsciousness with which this kind of language was systematically preferred made me hopeless that my department could set aside its identification with its professional persona and open up to more natural, human communication.

This idealized daydreaming, shifting back and forth from my experience in my organization to my memories of World Work, was the first expression of a process of integration that has evolved into this research project. I imagine that there are many other World Work alumni who have had similar experiences. Many times, superimposing visions of World Work onto the reality of my department's operations, I have asked the question: how could my learning from World Work be brought to Child Protective Services? Could I, a single individual, find a way to make this special awareness useful to the work of protecting children, which appears to be so defended from new input? If I couldn't shift my organization could I at least heal some of my sense of being in two worlds at once?

## HYBRID WORLD WORKER / CHILD PROTECTION WORKER

After a few years, my on-the-job daydreaming about World Work inspired me to develop some new approaches to providing direct services to families at risk of abusing their children. I developed professionally into a kind of hybrid World Worker / Child protection Worker. I took every opportunity to increase my coworkers' awareness of the complexities and uniqueness of our client families – that they are mysteries that cannot be reduced to diagnoses, and as such can be known only through direct engagement. I learned how to make a hypothesis about a client, interact with them, and let their feedback tell me if my hypothesis needed modification. I developed a greater appreciation for the subtlety and sensitivity involved in supporting clients to bring forth new, unfamiliar parts of themselves to heal their lacks as parents. In a profession based on making decisions about children's safety with their parents, often under emergency conditions, I learned how to resist the pressures to come to premature conclusions.

To give an example: I once worked with a family to which the father had returned after many years of incarceration for a violent crime. He demanded that his children, who had been taken away from their mother, not him, be returned to him immediately. He was extremely intimidating and demonstrated a very bad case of “prison manners,” the presentation and behaviors that incarcerated men develop to ward off attack from fellow prisoners. I was concerned about his history and his violent manner. I couldn’t assess to what extent his threatening behavior was a bluff and to what extent it was an authentic expression of rage. At the very least, I needed more time to get to know him. As a Child Protection worker, I had no legal standing to delay the return of his children to him. However, his children were in early adolescence and had a right to have a say where they were placed. They had not seen him for several years and were resisting returning to him. I told the father that I would do whatever I could to help him re-establish a relationship with his children, but I would not do anything to influence his children to return to him before they wanted to. I decided to trust that the progression of the father’s relationship with his children would show the way.

Sometimes the father responded positively to my strategy, did good work with me, and expressed appreciation of our relationship. Other times, he attacked me verbally as the main cause of his problems. Once he accused me of hiding behind his children because I was too much of a coward to stand openly for my opposition to him. Throughout our relationship, the father alternated between berating me for not taking his side more actively to expressing a sincere and touching humility and earnestness about becoming his children’s father again. I honored and respected him for his willingness to change, but I still feared him and distrusted his ability to fulfill his good intentions. He persisted in his ambivalence, and I decided to respond in kind. We developed an edgy relationship of mutual trust strained by ambivalence. Inspired by my Process Work and World Work learning, I simply held this ambiguity, continued offering services, and waited.

This strategy was not appreciated by my professional colleagues. My supervisor became impatient, trying to force me to decide one way or the other. She accused me of indecisiveness. I explained my case plan approach as well as I could – that I wanted to trust that the progression of the father’s relationship with his children would show the way – and I continued to offer services and wait. There were measured advances in the development of a



relationship between the father and his children. The children met the father's new wife and visited them in their home, and they began to accept him as their father and as a person with both good and difficult qualities. However, there was no real change in the children's refusal to leave their foster home and move in with him, and the father lost his temper with me a few times over the phone, to the point of making explicit physical threats. It became clearer and clearer to me that I had put myself in a vulnerable position by adopting a case plan approach that the department did not fully support and that made the father sometimes very angry. Both my supervisor and my client were accusing me of character flaws and poor social work. However, my Process Work and World Work studies had shown me the importance of following nature, and I continued to hold together all the contradictory aspects of this situation, offer services, and wait.

This story has a tragic ending. The father killed his new wife and was incarcerated for life. However, in the time leading up to this terrible resolution, I was able to provide caring, professional services that held the tension of the opposites and honored a mystery without forcing an interpretation on it. The father continued pursuing his destiny. The children had their private inner processes, first of adjusting to their father's advances when he was trying to rebuild their relationship and later of grieving his loss when (as they said) "he did something really stupid" and was taken from them again. I believe that they were supported to find their own truths in this situation with minimal agency interruption because I held back from taking a stand.

World Work supported me to develop this tolerance for ambiguity and this confidence to develop a more flexible approach to Child Protection work. In other cases, World Work helped me become more sensitive to my social rank as a professional and challenged me to be watchful for the ways this rank could get in the way of working in partnership with families. I began to see that a family's apparent resistance to my agency's services was often the result of careless agency communication that left families unable to understand the department's point of view. When my department exercised its socially mandated responsibilities without explaining itself, its use of its rank felt abusive to families and they responded by resisting. Because World Work had made me sensitive to this dynamic, I made special efforts to explain the operations of my department to families, seeking to relate departmental policy to their value system. This helped them feel not quite

so left out of the process. As a result, they became more responsive to my agency's interventions.

My new educational approach was especially valuable in establishing a working relationship with extended family members and concerned community persons so that we could partner in motivating parents to rehabilitate. Family support persons have a very complex relationship with the department. They are aware that the parents have problems caring for their children and they may want outside help, but when they cannot understand the department's words or actions or relate them to their experience of the family's problems, they question if the department is being helpful. This sometimes causes them to polarize with the department, minimize the parents' problems, and defend the status quo.

For example, a grandmother, the mother of a drug-addicted parent, often suffers from intense contradictory feelings. She may be angry with her child, the parent, for failing to care for her grandchild. On the other hand, she may fear the harm that the drug lifestyle is doing to her child, and this may sometimes distract her from appreciating how her grandchild is being neglected. Or she may blame herself for her child's addiction, seeing herself, not the mother, as the failed parent. The department will often place the grandchild with its grandmother, and then the grandmother may also feel overwhelmed and resentful at having to return to the demands of parenting. She may also have a whole range of feelings about the other parent and that side of the family. This grandmother's emotional conflicts cause her to interpret my agency's words and actions from the perspective of her distress. Because her tendency to project on my agency is aggravated when she cannot understand its words and actions, she benefits from a thorough education into the ways of the Child Protection system. Armed with this knowledge she can become a very valuable ally to the social worker. The social worker also benefits from this dialogue by gaining a deeper understanding of the grandmother's complex feelings about this stressful situation. What begins as an exchange of information can develop into a deep dialogue about shared values and how a bureaucracy and a family member may act on these shared values in different ways..

Extended families stressed by the addiction of a parent are common in Child Protection work. Sometimes, however I worked with other, less typical family situations and achieved unexpected successes. Although it is more common for families to minimize the problems of parents when relating to Child Protection Services, sometimes they exaggerate

these problems. When they do, they can exert an uncanny influence on how the “identified patient” is viewed and treated by the department and other agencies. I remember the case of a mother who had episodes of severe disorientation and self-isolation. By the time this case was transferred to me, my department had decided she had a mental illness that prevented her from caring for her son, and this child had been taken out of her home and placed with his grandmother. As I became acquainted with the mother and her support system, I discovered that this grandmother with whom the son had been placed was overreacting to the mother’s problems. She had somehow convinced psychological service providers and our agency of her own, very subjective view of the mother. The mother was not strong enough to stand up to the resulting bias against her that developed among agencies.

This story has a happy ending. I successfully demonstrated that the mother was not too incapacitated to be a parent. In this instance, my department did not react negatively to having its position about the mother refuted. In fact, they appreciated my work. I was also able to help the grandmother manage her anxiety to the extent that she could at least trust the mother enough to allow her to successfully complete her case plan and have her son reunited with her. In addition, I successfully engaged the grandmother in a discussion of appropriate and inappropriate uses of professional agencies, demonstrating to her that they needed accurate, objective information to function effectively. She appeared to understand this point well enough to discontinue giving biased input about the mother to medical providers or my agency. Freed of the negative influence of the grandmother’s projections, the mother found her own therapist and psychiatrist, successfully completed treatment, and had her family restored.

Not all aspects of my hybrid approach were so serious. I playfully addressed my department’s status as scapegoat in the community by developing a way of talking about my work when I was at parties. Most Child Protective workers avoid disclosing their profession in social situations because they dread the reactions of fear and /or contempt that they get. I adopted a different approach. I came out as a Child Protective worker and then led the conversation to a consideration of the ambiguities of a hypothetical case, at the end of which I would ask the other person to decide the best course of action to keep a child safe while still appropriately connected to her family. I enjoyed watching the other person’s fear and contempt turn to grudging, sometimes even awed respect as she recognized the difficulty of the choices that are the basis of Child Protective work. This party game used World Work

tools to create a playful way of building community partnerships by asking different roles in a field to adopt each other's viewpoints: it challenged a small segment of the public to experience Child Protective work from the inside, and it also challenged me to open up to the public and discover that they could become my allies.

These were real, but limited successes. Although I came to be appreciated by some of my coworkers for my different approach to our work, I continued to feel isolated when in the office. My organization has no role of awareness facilitator, and thus I could only bring in World Work concepts through informal discussions with a small circle of coworkers.

## WORLD WORK AND FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING MUTUALLY SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

I probably would have resigned by now, had it not been for an unexpected change in my organization. Six years ago, my office began to use Family Group Decision Making conferencing, and, thanks to the reputation I had earned from my hybrid, World Worker / Child Protection worker approach, I was hired to be an organizer and facilitator of these conferences. Finally, I was involved in bringing awareness to my organization's operations in an official capacity! In this role, I had many opportunities to bring together the two worlds of Child Protection and World Work. My previous daydreams about my agency attending a World Work workshop, which I describe in an earlier chapter, appeared to be coming true.

I remember a conference with a large extended family that included three ministers, very powerful individuals. A meeting was called for this family because it was demonstrating severe non-compliance with the department's case plan and causing the social worker great distress. After we had been working together for several hours, the ministers turned to the worker, admitted that they had been alienated by actions of the agency they did not understand, apologized to her for causing her distress by their resistance, and then very caringly asked her to work with them to develop a more constructive partnership. Alienated family members, a previously marginalized part of the system became central to the system by taking over the role of the social worker. In their new role, they did a kind of social work that expanded all participants' previous conceptions of what social work could be. This is the

kind of fluid moving in and out of roles that occurs in a World Work workshop. As a result, a part previously experienced as a disturbance showed a new way to bring the whole together.

Facilitating family conferences brought me many opportunities to witness a family healing itself in a way that neither I nor my agency could ever have imagined. For example, there was a family with a stay-at-home, depressive father who spent so much time on the internet that he was neglecting the needs of his autistic child. A family conference was called to marshal extended family to support him.

When these family members arrived, they responded to my facilitative interventions with a quirky, disrespectful humor. A mainstream Child Protection worker would probably have pathologized this family's behavior and imposed a "professional" style of communication, initiating mutual alienation between the family and the agency. I took a different approach, joining in their quirky state, and soon they were celebrating the special gifts that the autistic boy brought to their family. They used the phrase "lunacy power" to describe his contribution. This was not the kind of language ordinarily used in my agency's communications about families. Most social workers would avoid this way of talking, fearing they will be perceived as disrespectful or politically incorrect, but embracing this eccentric language was a portal to a new world of familial caring and support. In all my years working with families of special needs children, I had never met a family that so enthusiastically celebrated the difference of their child.

Their conference ended with a plan to create a website, monitored by the father, which the entire extended family could use to stay updated about the child's needs and plan for ways to support the father as caregiver. In this Family Group Decision Making conference, the family's two main presenting problems, the autistic quirkiness of the child and the computer-obsessed unrelated behavior of his father, were transmuted into solutions beyond the wildest dreams of conventional Child Protective work.

## **A BACKLASH AGAINST WORLD WORK AND FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING VALUES**

During this period, my job was a joy and a constant source of inspiration. However, at a certain point, as I became more and more aware and fluid in my work, I came into

conflict with my department's sense of itself. My way of facilitating family conferences began to seriously complicate my role status in an organization that has a very simplistic concept of roles. On one hand, I was a worker at the bottom of the chain of command. In an organization that uses hierarchical structure to control awareness, I was in the role that has least permission to be aware. On the other hand, I was a facilitator of family meetings that challenged the department to become more aware of its operations. My work assignment was based on a mixed message at the systemic level, and as I became more skillful in fulfilling this self-contradictory role I became guilty of a role violation simply by doing my job well.

Let me give an example of how my work put me in opposition to the established culture of my organization. As Family Group decision making conferences became more and more part of the operations of the department, certain social workers and their supervisors developed a way of participating in conferences which involved leaving the group at certain points to have a discussion among professionals that the family was not privy to. Their justification was that family meetings sometimes revealed new information that forced them to re-consider their approach to a case and it would somehow disrupt a meeting if family members or persons in the community witnessed them doing this. In a World Work workshop, this would be seen as one part of a group protecting its rank and privilege over another part. It is a clear violation of the democratic values of both World Work and Family Group Decision Making. The professionals protect themselves from the risk of being seen in an embarrassing light, and families are left to draw their own conclusions about why they did not deserve to be part of all of the discussion in their meeting. I tried several ways to address this. I recommend that, since these private meetings risked making families feel less safe in a meeting, the department should be restrict their use. My feedback was ignored and I was left to wonder if I had created resentment that I would pay for later. The established culture of my agency was reverting to a pattern of defending itself against awareness.

It was only a matter of time before a backlash developed in my department against Family Group Decision Making. This backlash took different forms in different levels of my organization. In my office it took the form of hiring someone to supervise me who was temperamentally antagonistic to the core values of this work. My new supervisor could not participate in democratic processes. She could not partner with others as equals because she could not have a constructive conversation with someone who disagreed with her. Her stubbornness when opposed was legendary. She once argued with a coworker about the

spelling of a word, even after she was shown a dictionary proving her wrong. Another time, she argued with a coworker about the age of the coworker's child. She compensated for her disability with democratic processes by rigidly insisting on the privileges of her position on the chain of command, which made her difficult to work with and almost impossible to work under. She had previously been so unsuccessful as a training supervisor that many workers in her unit had resigned before the department had been able to recoup the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training them. In a private sector business she would have been fired for her negative impact on staff retention and what it cost the business. In a bureaucracy, staff like her are not fired but moved to another place in the organization, no explanation given. I could write a whole chapter of this paper describing the different interpretations that were shared in my department's gossip pipeline to make sense of management assigning her to supervise me as the Family Group Decision Making facilitator in our office. Whatever management had in mind, the results were to slow down the momentum of my program and reduce the impact I was having on the established culture of my agency.

I was not the only person in the office whom my new supervisor sought to control. Many staff persons experienced her as a brake to the emergence of a democratic, creative problem-solving culture in our office. These staffs learned, however, that they could not complain about my supervisor to her superior. These two had a lifelong friendship and shared many issues as African American women managing workers of races and genders that outranked them in the larger society. This is an example of resistance to change on the personal and relationship levels. In addition, my supervisor's supervisor had previously openly complained about Family Group Decision Making being an example of upper management's tendency to shove new programs down the throat of middle management, so this may have also been an example of resistance on the systemic level.

As I wrote earlier, my relationship with this manager became fodder for gossip in my office, but this gossip did not solve any of my problems. This relationship was only one element in a very complex trend toward backlash involving my entire department. My problem was that, as a World Work alumnus, I was experiencing the vicissitudes of a personal revolution, struggling to integrate a life-changing experience of World Work, seeking to find ways to make my social work practice congruent with my new values, while working inside a system experiencing a revolution and counter revolution of its own. As a changing individual within a changing system, I needed to develop ways to survive a

bewildering interplay of processes around and within me. At a certain point, I realized that I could not meet this challenge without finding a new way to apply the concepts and tools of Process Work and World Work, using them as the basis for an inner work focus on my situation in my agency.

In the next chapter, I will introduce the concepts and tools that I used as the basis for this more committed and focused inner work.



**SORTING THROUGH TOPICS  
FOR MY INNER WORK**

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## **SORTING THROUGH TOPICS FOR MY INNER WORK**

Sessions in World Work typically begin with sorting for a topic on which to focus. Because these workshops can have three hundred participants from twenty countries, there are always more topics than can be addressed. There is often tension between different parts of the group, each preferring a different topic. It is therefore necessary to have consensus to explore a certain topic. As an individual doing inner work, I took a different approach to sorting through topics. I started with identifying possible topics. In this section, I will introduce three the topics that express defining group processes of my organization.

### **FIRST TOPIC: POWER IN PLAY**

The first topic concerns the predominance of power in Child Protection work. Relationships in my organization tend to be based on coercion rather than collaboration. Workers on all levels are rated on their ability either to perform according to other's demands or to force others to perform. Some of this focus on power is understandable: society holds my agency responsible for protecting vulnerable children from bad parenting, and this requires dealing with an almost endless array of psychological, social, and economic problems. However, although Child Protection work seems to require an almost superhuman capacity, the focus on power has become exaggerated to the point that other kinds of human relating are marginalized.

Trust, for example, should be a central theme in relating to parents with a history of abusing their children. All the important assessments made by my department are, at heart, assessments of the parent's trustworthiness. The central organizing question of Child Protective work is *can my department trust that parents will not abuse their children again?* Yet one virtually never hears the word trust used. The culture of Child Protective work does not support workers to develop in their ability to trust responsibly. Lacking a focus on this basic aspect of human relating, workers often resort to an approach that coerces the family to comply with a treatment plan, rather than helping them to make sustainable changes. Instead of trusting families to rehabilitate, the department relies on accumulating evidence that it has done all it could to change them. In Child Protection work, this is referred to as "making

reasonable efforts.” This approach allows the department to excuse itself from being held responsible if the family fails to provide safety for its children in the future.

Mutuality is another relationship aspect that is marginalized by Child Protection’s focus on coercion. Staffs in my department tend to do for families rather than creating a means for the families and their supporting communities to do for themselves. Child Protective workers do not seek to learn about the strengths that families and their communities could bring to the task of creating safety and security for children. Case plans do not provide opportunities for families to contribute. For many Child Protective workers, the highest virtue a family can demonstrate is compliance with the department’s case plan. The word compliance is as common in this work as the word trust is rare. Compliant families make it easy for overworked, frustrated social workers to feel powerful.

The result is that families and communities my department is supposed to serve are too often overpowered and disempowered by its intervention in their lives. In the long run, this reduces families’ ability to make children safe and secure. Ironically, this destructive over-emphasis on power is because most members of my organization experience themselves as lacking power. They have so little local rank within the organization they forget how much social rank they have in the larger community. I imagine that, if my organization were in a World Work workshop and this topic was proposed, there would be a loud chorus complaining about how the Play of Power oppresses them as workers. On the other hand, if community members participating in the workshop tried to address the power that Child Protection exerts over them, the group would quickly be brought to an edge.

## SECOND TOPIC: CONSTANT, SHIFTING CHANGE

Another topic concerns the Constant, Shifting Change to which workers in my organization are subjected. As was shown by a series of newspaper articles in the Prelude section of this paper, Child Protection Services suffers from the assault of one sided, simplistic attacks on its complex and difficult decisions. I quoted a critic of Child Protection work who cited “an ever-changing often contradictory and politicized landscape of expectations for what constitutes the ‘correct answer.’” Any effort to reform this profession

is likely to be seen as one more demand imposed from the outside. Unfortunately, such demands are frequent. Because of its low success rate, Child Protective work has been subjected to repeated reform efforts. Family Group Decision Making, described in other parts of this paper, is only the latest attempt to improve this work. My organization has developed different roles to accommodate the disorientation and insecurities that go with the resulting Constant, Shifting Change.

Although most staffs in my department fear and hate progress and innovation, a small group of us loves it. Throughout my life, I have felt oppressed by the status quo and longed for anything that promised some improvement. My attraction to progressive movements drew me to both World Work and Family Group Decision Making. This research project has been inspired by my desire to bring the revolutionary values of World Work into consensus reality organizations. My role as a facilitator of family meetings has partly realized this dream, empowering me as an agent of change in my organization.

Through doing this research, I came to recognize my one-sidedness on this topic. I tend to be antagonistic to roles that seek to defend against exploring a new approach. Ironically, my original motivation for this research was the culture shock that I experienced while trying to integrate World Work trainings. In other words, I discovered a part of myself that has trouble with change, the same role I have habitually opposed in groups. I cannot help but wonder if my own integration process wouldn't have been furthered by taking the side of certain opponents in the last several years. If my organization was in a World Work workshop and this topic was proposed, I imagine that a majority would complain or express cynicism about the constant stream of new initiatives. I have come to appreciate that these voices have something to contribute, and they might have also guided me to a more successful expression of my role as change agent.

### THIRD TOPIC: CRONYISM

There is a trend in my bureaucracy toward forming special friendships and cliques, part of the familial culture I described in the Prelude of this paper. It is natural that staffs should attempt to protect themselves by forming relationships that offer support and a sense

of belonging that the larger organization does not. Unfortunately, this trend to social networks predisposes bureaucrats to giving special favors to friends, including work assignments the friend is not competent to complete. The public's belief that bureaucracies are contaminated by cronyism is unfortunately true of my organization.

If my organization was in a World Work workshop and this topic was proposed, some staffs would strongly advocate exploring it and others would be very resistant. However, special friendships play an important role in balancing the other two themes I have identified. My organization cannot be fully understood without developing an awareness of how bullying, insecurity, and the excesses of cronyism complement each other.

In the next chapter I will apply world work tools to do inner work on my organization.

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## FOCUSING ON THE TOPICS

This chapter attempts to capture in writing some of what I have learned about my department by using World Work tools as templates for inner work. I have had limited success in this endeavor. I did not achieve definitive adaptations of World Work tools that other World Work alumni can use. In addition, my written account of working with these tools will sometimes be an imperfect record of elusive insights into group dynamics. My work is only a beginning, yet I am encouraged that my use of these tools has helped me better orient myself to difficult social fields in my agency.

## SENSING THE ATMOSPHERE

The first World Work tool for developing awareness of a process is sensing its atmosphere. The atmosphere created by a group is like the impression one has on meeting a person for the first time: one often responds automatically, without any awareness that one is doing so. Developing an ability to focus on an atmosphere can be a valuable step in participating consciously in a group field.

When I reflect on first impressions of my agency, I think of entering my office at the beginning of a workday and sensing an atmosphere that puts me into a different state than the one I left the house with. This atmosphere can vary day to day, or even hour to hour, depending on information received in any of the channels. Frequently, the first staff person I meet has movements and a general demeanor that communicate a sense of being pressured to act: her movements controlled but hurried, her body tensed, her head and eyes directed to her task. She does not make contact with me.

My experience of joining her in this space is in the movement channel (the way she moves), the proprioception channel (a tension in her body that I resonate to) and the relationship channel (her lack of relatedness). All these channel experiences contribute to creating an atmosphere that affects me. Depending on my mood, I may mainly respond to her controlled hurrying and begin moving faster myself; I may pick up her tension and begin worrying about my work; I may react to her unrelatedness and feel isolated, lonely, and rejected; or I may refuse to be affected by any of these signals and polarize with the field by

feeling alienated and lazy. However I respond, sensing a particular atmosphere has drawn me into a group process where Power is in Play.

Before World Work, I was not aware of the information that was inviting me into an atmosphere. I was even less aware of the channel through which this information was being transmitted. Inside a social field animated by a play of power, I had only an undifferentiated feeling of pressure and tension that had a tendency to make me hurry or be impatient. I was not able to determine if this experience was inside or outside me. Now, when I have insights about channels of information, they support me to be freer in choosing how I will participate in a group field. Later in this paper, I will more deeply explore my experiences of this theme.

Here, let me continue this exploration by studying the atmosphere of a group process of Constant Shifting Change. This atmosphere seems to be mainly evoked in the verbal channel. The communications of child protection workers are full of details. The job, as people say, is "detail oriented." A typical statement heard in my office will include reference to a particular form, a minute description of some nuance of policy or law, or a very exact description of a client's behavior. This way of talking creates an atmosphere of mental busyness, of people striving to stay oriented in a changing world where current, accurate information is at a premium. The tension created by this effort to be exact complements the pressured atmosphere created by the play of power. Entering my office, one feels an urgency to think and act in a certain way: the ability of the department to ensure the safety of children depends on it.

I often simply react to this atmosphere, without awareness of how a kind of language is creating it. Because of my personal history, I am less aware and more reactive in a field of hyperactive calculating than in one where coercion is exercised. All the other men in my family are engineers, executives, scientists, but I prefer to work creatively with big pictures, savoring the different facets of an underlying, organizing theme, and I was marginalized in my family for my apparent dreaminess. As a result, I see myself as a person who is "bad" with details. In a group preoccupied with staying oriented to a multitude of facts, I feel lost. When I think of what it is like for me to be in a field animated by constantly changing information, I identify an undifferentiated feeling of pressure and tension that makes me feel compelled to think as quickly and clearly as possible.



Finally, I would like to describe the atmosphere I feel in a field radiating the compassionate supportiveness that sets the stage for Cronyism. I discussed earlier how staffs enjoy celebrating the support that special friendships provide in a generally unsupportive work environment. Here one is at home and cared for and there is a disarming and attractive lack of tension, a feeling that one does not associate with a workplace. The atmosphere is like the merged relationship a child has with her mother. When I think of what it is like for me to be in a social field animated by this spirit, I think of an undifferentiated sensation of acceptance and forgiveness that causes me to disavow any critical thoughts I may have about myself, my coworkers, or my agency. In this social field, the tendency of bureaucracies to avoid critical awareness is especially pronounced.

Cronyism is a complex theme. Although it begins as an effort to compensate for workplace harshness, it becomes a corrupting influence within an organization. Cronyism creates a sweet feeling that diffuses stress, but things are as simple as they first appear. The stress that has been marginalized from the merged relating reappears in an attitude that the world is divided between two kinds of people: those who understand what I and my friends have to deal with and those who don't. Caring becomes primary for this group in a way that implies a secondary process that is not caring and that therefore deserves to be excluded from being cared for. I recognize that I am inside a social field dominated by the spirit of cronyism when I participate in gossip that goes too far in creating an "us versus them" atmosphere. I may feel pressured to join with others in resenting some absent person as a condition of being included in the caring, and I may begin to feel the presence of the primitive rule that says "My enemy's enemy is my friend." Another signal of the field of cronyism is finding myself involved in a coziness I don't believe or agree with. I may feel that in fact I have areas of disagreement with the people with whom I am being asked to merge and that it would be valuable to explore these areas. As a result, I do not want to join in the coziness, but I may be afraid not to, fearing that if I do not join I will become ostracized. I think of another primitive rule: "You're either for us or against us."

Another expression of cronyism involves being passed over for a deserved job opportunity and then offered a consolation prize with no explanation given. This situation separates work from meaningful recognition and creates a patronizing atmosphere that is secondary in a field of compassionate caring. All employees in a bureaucracy are to some degree the beneficiaries of this kind of special treatment. Once they pass their six months'

probation it is hard to fire or demote them. Instead, personnel problems are solved by apparently arbitrary assignment changes that can create the impression that someone is being favored over someone else. Staffs in a bureaucracy come to feel that any privileges they enjoy are undeserved gifts with no relationship to their work performance. They are all, to that extent, cronies.

## INNER WORK ON THE CRONY

This recognition challenges me to turn from analysis of the field and look inside for the essential nature of the crony. I begin a sentient meditation by returning to the feeling of being at home, relieved of stress and demands. I ask myself, where in my body do I feel this relief? My skin feels warm and soothed, like I have been patted and caressed. I feel relaxed, ready to sink into a comfortable bosom. The essence is a passive and receptive feeling. When I go still deeper into this passivity, I discover a sense of belonging that I long for in life but don't usually feel. In particular, I do not associate this feeling with a job situation. I associate work with being challenged as an individual, put on my own resources and not always given a reward of acceptance after a job well done. As I sink further into a sense of belonging and imagine what it would be like to experience it at my job, I discover a deep spiritual connection between work and the reward of social acceptance. I go to an ideal workplace where we are all the same, equals with shared goals and therefore transparent to each other, mutually supporting each other at a level deeper than disagreement or rivalry. I find a sense of wholeness in work that is so lacking in Child Protection.

This sentient inner work changes the way I feel about the cronyism in my office. I am no longer surprised that my supervisor, battered by unfair demands and disappointed in her striving for recognition, would make a pact with the devil in order to have an experience of belonging like the one I found through my meditation. In this recognition, I am relieved of the low dream of demonizing her. I am also freed of the urge to flip back into a high dream state of trusting her. I understand that I and my coworkers are all to some extent cronies, and I have found, for the moment, a no dream acceptance of this fact

A meditation like this helps me to tolerate the stress of maintaining awareness of the intricacies of the social field I have been analyzing. In the lived experience of working for

the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services, the three atmospheres I have described flow together in ways that risk throwing me onto a high dream / low dream roller coaster. Failure to be powerful in protecting children leads to reform efforts that create change that contributes to staff insecurity... The harsh excesses of the Play of Power and Constant Shifting Change call forth a compassionate mothering acceptance of all staff that degenerates into Cronyism.... The incompetence of cronies stimulates new harsh measures to coerce better performance or leads to the disruption of another reform effort.... This moiré of blended atmospheres, this zany, incongruent dance of different social fields, creates a sense of an organization careening without insight or direction, which stimulates further harsh outside criticisms, as described in the Prelude section.... As my inner work brings a more and more differentiated awareness to these atmospheres, it uncovers complexities that exceed my powers of analysis or my ability to maintain a detached, neutral awareness.

It's in these situations that I miss World Work the most. However, I also feel that the individual efforts I describe here are useful. Simply making space for the role of the student relieves some of the culture shock of being in a group that is not seeking to learn about itself. I will do more inner work on this later.

## PICKING UP ON CONVERSATIONS

Another way to be drawn into a social field is by hearing the talk that typically occurs inside it. All groups produce stereotypical conversations that, repeated over and over, affect the listener more by their music than by their words. This talk is an aspect of what World Work refers to as consensual relating. I have described the detail-oriented communications inside a shifting and changing field. To give another example, inside a group field in power play, staffs talk about a task they fear they cannot accomplish or a work deadline they fear they cannot meet or (guardedly) discuss a supervisor who is pressuring them. They may complain about having more than their share of work and express their resentment of other workers who appear to have less work. Other times, they may complain about the shortcomings of support staff. Angry talk about peers or staff lower on the chain of command is less restrained than complaints about staff higher up, because there is no fear of retribution.

However it is expressed though, this talk evokes a fear and vulnerability in the listener. As a result, staffs feel bullied, not only by management's unfair demands, but by the criticism of a spirit that can, at its whim, speak through any one at any time. This kind of conversation may temporarily relieve the pain of being constantly pressured to perform, but its long-term effect adds new dimensions to this pressure.

## IDENTIFYING ROLES ORGANIZING A SOCIAL FIELD: POWER IN PLAY

Noticing a group's atmosphere and listening to its talk reveal the particular interactions that structure a social field and give it its unique character. All groups have roles that help characterize them. World Work has tools that help group members study these roles and the way they relate to each other. Through doing this, groups learn about themselves. The group first identifies roles and then creates a space for them to engage with each other. Adapting this method to inner work, I will identify some of these roles and do a structural analysis regarding which are primary and which secondary to my department's sense of itself.

In a field dominated by the Play of Power, the first role is the hurrying, tense worker, struggling to meet unreasonable demands. This role is central to understanding my organization. It is the role that virtually everyone identifies with. The valiant, put upon social worker is the primary process of Child Protective Services. This role speaks in a kind of monologue, complaining to coworkers who may or may not be paying any attention. It talks on and on, trying to create awareness of its plight. This role's monologue is the most commonly heard speech in this field

Another important role in this field is the worker who is not able to adequately perform, who, through incompetence or shirking, cannot or will not meet the demands placed upon her. Because this role is the butt of most of the stressed worker's complaining, no one in my organization willingly identifies with it. The typical worker experiences the incompetent or lazy peer as undermining her efforts to get the job done. This makes this role a secondary process of the group.

A third role is the oppressive manager who imposes impossible performance demands and timetables with a “do it or else” attitude. This role is secondary for my department: with so many people in the organization suffering the effects of coercion, no one wants to admit to being a bully. This role is also a ghost role in the field: because staffs do not dare address it directly, it can only be discussed in the group when it is not actually present. When it is present, this role identifies with areas where it lacks rank and sees itself the victim of demands from higher ups. Unfortunately, no one with lower rank dares educate it about how it victimizes subordinates through its unconscious use of rank.

## A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF ROLES

Like the processes within an individual, the roles in a group can be organized by structural analysis as either primary or secondary. Primary roles carry the identity of the group; secondary roles are experienced as impeding the group’s intentions. A structural analysis of the roles just described shows that there is a primary process of the bullied, under-appreciated worker and two secondary process roles: the incapable or shirking worker and the bullying manager. When a self-identified competent worker in my organization complains, she often presents herself as equally harried by both these roles. These three roles are the main structuring components of a field where power is in play.

So far, the relationships between these roles are clear, but they will become less so as this analysis progresses. Before I go further, I need to explain that these roles do not only exist in Consensus Reality. They also exist in Dreamland, where they organize a social field in the same fluid way that figures in dreams organize a dream. In contrast, in consensus reality the roles related to Power in Play are rigidly organized according to the chain of command. Regional Administrators, who manage a particular site, control the work of Assistant Regional Administrators, who have authority over supervisors, who give orders to social workers providing direct services to clients. These relationships are defined by policy and the culture of my department.

Here is an example of a dream role’s fluidity. Despite the competent worker’s complaining, her fear is that she may have a bit of the incompetent worker in her. This fear is one of the factors that motivate her criticism: she is projecting her incompetence. In doing

so, she takes on the role of the bully. The three roles are constantly on the verge of shifting into each other.

The dreamlike interaction of these roles is still more complicated. The inadequate performer's role is subdivided into two parts: poor performers who are blameworthy and those who are blameless by virtue of being handicapped in some way. A publicly funded bureaucracy has a special commitment to employ the differently abled. The receptionist in our office is legally blind: he and his Seeing Eye dog greet clients. Their presence creates a warm welcome for families and contributes to my agency. Sometimes, however, equal opportunity hiring results in situations that call into question my agency's commitment to adequate performance. The clerk for my unit, who interacts extensively with clients over the phone, is a recent immigrant whose English speaking skills are severely limited. This detracts from her ability to schedule appointments. One of the typists in our office has been diagnosed with a schizophrenic disorder. Because he does not understand the sense of what he is typing, he regularly produces bizarre documents that must be laboriously corrected by staff. The presence of these kinds of worker creates confusion in a demanding culture by appearing to create a class that is exempt from normal expectations of work performance.

This confusion is deepened by the prevalence of a particular kind of caring attention given to workers who become disabled on the job. Bureaucracies, organizations where no one is ever fired, appear to gradually accumulate an unusual number of workers who have developed a specific problem that prevents them from performing fully. Child Protective work is perceived by staff as being "bad for your health," and these fallen comrades acquire a special protected status by virtue of the fact that everyone dreads ending up like them. This then is another secondary role structuring the field of Power in Play: the inadequate one who is deserving of pity and for whom allowances need to be made. One especially remarkable feature of my organization is the rapidity with which a blamed, even scapegoated underachiever can transform into an object of respectful pity by being diagnosed with an identifiable medical or "stress related" problem. The frequency of this shift appears to be the expression of a group edge to hold colleagues accountable for poor performance in a situation where everyone agrees the demands are unreasonable.

Whatever the cause, this strikingly rapid shift from scorn to acceptance further contributes to staffs' sense of impotence because it makes the play of power seem even more

illogical and arbitrary: not only are work demands excessive and unfairly distributed, but the reward for a job well done is indistinguishable from the patronizing recognition given to someone who cannot perform adequately. This contributes to the low morale in my department. In a perverse way, it also makes inadequacy attractive. Competent workers tired of participating in a punishing culture, sometimes secretly long to take the disabled role. You hear this in their complaining conversations, which contain double signals asking for pity.

Valiantly struggling competent workers...bullying managers who do not acknowledge their bullying, preferring to present themselves to their victims as fellow sufferers of an oppressively demanding culture...cynical shirkers who pretend to be overworked...fallen comrades, beset with work-related health problems...basically decent, responsible employees overwhelmed by stress and lack of appreciation, who indulge briefly in petty cruelty against coworkers who have let them down.... Is it surprising that my department resists becoming aware of the painful intricacies of a social field preoccupied with a competence and a power that recede like mirages the more strenuously they are pursued? As bad as this sounds, however, it gets worse. At a certain point, the dysfunction and impotence result in a reform effort, which introduces another level of complexity into an already confused system....

## IDENTIFYING ROLES AND RANK RELATIONSHIPS IN A FIELD OF CONSTANT, SHIFTING CHANGE

A social field struggling to accommodate a reform effort develops its own roles. I described earlier how a culture of detail-oriented talk characterizes this kind of field. The roles in this field, orienting themselves in different ways to an environment of change, can be distinguished by the way they communicate details.

Some staff persons make detailed statements in a relaxed way, as though they are talking to friends. There is no sense of being in a disorienting environment: they describe the way things have always been and always will be. Their way of speaking is a rank signal, creating the comfortable atmosphere of the insider. Their gracious communication invites the listener to join them on the inside, but this can aggravate the listener's sense of being an outsider. Like people with other forms of rank, they do not admit that their comfort is not

available to all. They do not acknowledge that others have different relationships to information, and their lack of acknowledgment further marginalizes these others.

The insider's ease of communication makes it hard for others to argue with them. Outside staff persons spit facts with gunshot percussiveness, expecting an attack on the correctness of some detail. Their speaking style exposes their struggle to keep up with change and establish membership with the insiders. Their strained tones are a rank signal, revealing less rank than the insiders.

Still other staff persons make rambling statements, piling detail upon detail in a frantic attempt to find the right combination of facts that will be seen as a knowledgeable utterance. Their way of speaking gives a sense of being lost and abandoned in a shifting world, no comfort or struggle left in them. Their frantic tones reveal they have the least rank in this social field.

## CRONYISM COMPLICATES THE DREAMLIKE BLENDING OF ROLES

In a field adjusting to change, disorientation is weakness and knowledge is power. The three kinds of speakers just described have different levels of contextual rank because they have differing levels of familiarity with how their agency operates. In many instances, these dreamland roles correspond to consensus reality roles. Those who speak with more ease are both higher in the organizational hierarchy and more insightful about operations in the agency. Chain of command is not always an arbitrary construct. Supervisors tend to be better oriented than the people they supervise. In those instances where an underling knows something her boss doesn't, they temporarily switch rank while information is exchanged and afterwards resume their role and rank relationships.

However, when cronyism is involved, dreamland and consensus reality roles don't always coexist comfortably. These situations can create an added level of complexity that World Work tools could help sort out. My relationship with my supervisor is an example. In consensus reality, she is authorized to make me do my job the way she wants it done. When there is disagreement, she is right and I am wrong. In dreamland, however, I already had three years experience in our program at the start of our working relationship, compared to



her total newness. In addition, my World Work training had prepared me to adjust to this new approach to social work, and a teamwork paradigm was more in line with my personal values. For these reasons, I have always been better oriented than she: I have contextual rank in our program. In a well functioning organization, we would adjust to this fact by switching rank whenever it is appropriate. However, Crony networks resist allowing their privileges to be brought to awareness and negotiated.

This resistance to awareness is shielding a complicated and painful background. Racism and sexism have made it difficult for African American women in my office to exercise their authority over white men. In response, they have over the years established a very powerful support network. They have succeeded in creating a situation where the superior organization of their network sometimes trumps other workers' superior understanding of the job. They do not always use their privileges for the benefit of the organization as a whole.

In this painful and confusing situation, several social fields are superimposed. First there is an overly rational policy, which mandates supervisors always have authority over their supervisees. Second is the dreamland field of a constantly changing organization, where the more competent worker is better oriented and has contextual rank. Third is another dreamland field in which white men have social rank over African American women whether or not they perform better on the job, and sometimes independent of their position on the chain of command. Fourth is a crony network, competing for power with the social rank of the white man. Unique interactions of these fields create the power dynamics in particular situations.

There are many intricacies in my agency still to be explored. I would like to end this analysis with one last role: the staff person who has seen so many organizational changes come and go that she has no illusions that the current proposed change will stick. Her expertise is not in the area of any particular reform effort. She is a specialist in the phases whereby a new program is introduced, enjoys its time of accomplishing something, but then is discredited and finally is replaced. Her motto is "This too shall pass." She is oriented to the long term processes of a bureaucracy, and she derives power from this.

As a disengaged observer, she holds a very important role in my agency: the worker who does not get caught up in the disorientation. Often a cynic, she is motivated by the same needs as the shirker: relief from a punishing, unrewarding work culture. As such, she and the shirker are related to the crony. Together, they are perhaps the primary process role in my agency, a role that everyone identifies with in moments of stress: the escapist. Unfortunately, this role is at risk of developing an attitude that is so caught up in defending itself from my agency's punishing culture that it loses awareness of its destructive impact on the organization as a whole. My hope in this research project is to find a way to detach from a dysfunctional culture while still caring for the whole. I believe that insight into an organization's workings can be made to serve an organization.

With the inclusion of this last role, the escapee, my analysis has progressed to the point of revealing a complex organizational dance unrelated to the mission and goals of my agency and often undermining that mission. This is the chaos and dysfunction in Child Protection work that attracts outside criticism, lawsuits, and demands for reform.

## SENTIENT ESSENCE EXPERIENCES OF CHILD PROTECTION WORK

I would like to end this section with a meditation on the essential core of the moiré of group processes I have described here. I ask myself, what is the process that underlies the multifaceted interactions of staff in the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services? What is the deepest experience I have of this work? In what part of my body is it located? I remember my earlier description of the worker who is often the first person I encounter upon entering my office at the beginning of a work day: a staff person whose movements and general demeanor communicate a sense of being pressured to act. Her movements may be controlled but hurried. Her body may be tensed. Her head and eyes may be directed to her task, to the point that she does not make contact with me. When I feel this worker in my body, I experience an overall tension, maybe also a heat, accompanied with a slightly nauseated sensation. I feel driven so deeply into myself that I cannot fully attend to the outside world. I feel lost and alone and beset by a terrifying sense of urgency. When I go deeper into this urgency, it feels different from a fight or flight response related to my own survival. It feels like an expression of the parenting instinct: a panic, not on my behalf, but

on behalf of someone vulnerable and in trouble whom I feel I must help, yet whom I do not know how to help. I hold this energy, exploring its deepest essence. My heart goes out: I feel called to give everything, to hold back nothing. I lose myself in surrendering to an energy I would never mobilize for any of my ordinary needs. I am aware, paradoxically, of a lack of awareness: nothing else is real. When I go deeper into this highly energized, highly focused state, I am no longer me. I am whatever a vulnerable child needs me to be.

When I return from this meditation to a consensus reality view of my organization, I have a different feeling about the pressure to act that often possesses me and my coworkers. I no longer adopt a low dream attitude that cynically sees us as bullied and manipulated into overextending ourselves. I can now appreciate that we are also driven by an inner passion to protect children. Adopting a no dream attitude that can consider both these aspects equally, I find an awareness of Child Protective work that supports me to more accurately evaluate the different kinds of imperative I feel on my job. It becomes easier to defend myself from unfair demands while honoring appropriate gut feelings of urgency.

After I have felt this energy for a while, my attention goes to my organization's scapegoat: the lazy or incompetent worker. When I think about this role, I recognize that a critical public thinks all of us in my agency are like this worker. From my experiences trying to bring change to my organization, I have found the culture of Child Protection to be, not lazy, but something just as disabling: so caught up in protecting agency homeostasis that we neglect our mission to children and their families. When I am in a consensus reality state, identifying as a Family Group Decision Making facilitator, I experience the role of the shirker as something outside myself getting in the way of me fulfilling my mission. Here I want to learn more about it by accepting that I too have this role in me.

I ask myself, where in my body do I feel this role? I sense a tightening in the upper part of my body. I draw my arms closer to myself. My hands pull into my body, no longer available to relate to the outside. My eyes also draw in. My general energy level diminishes. I feel a stubborn refusal to relax and open up. When I go deeper into this state of stubbornness, I discover that I am waiting, simply passively waiting. I continue waiting and become aware of an inner emptiness. I do not like this feeling. It seems to be provoking me to come out and engage somehow with the world. In this state, I would appreciate some distraction. I decide that I have reached an edge to going further into my emptiness, and I

return to waiting. I experience waves of self dislike. I am tempted to accuse myself of being a shirker: another edge experience. I return to being empty. Eventually, gradually, the emptiness starts to take a form. It becomes something with its own shape, not limitless emptiness, but a limited something. Words come from this something: "I cannot give more than I have." These words are unanswerable; they silence any criticisms of being a shirker. Coming from a part that I previously experienced as empty, they empty me. I merge with them. Inside the words, I experience a self-acceptance that relaxes my stubbornness. I find more words: "I can't do this by myself." Going deeper into these words, I discover the statement: "Together, we can do this somehow." My stubborn withdrawal relaxes, and I feel able to return in a new way, at my own pace, to the outside.

After this inner work, I see the culture of my organization with fresh eyes. I discover examples of unfair distribution of labor. I find work assignments that are so undoable as to raise questions about the competence of the managers who have issued them. I see incompletely executed jobs that burden later workers. I notice again the situations in which my organization tolerates poor work. My meditation has freed me from simply reacting to all this with a low dream of betrayed expectations. I recognize that much more is being expressed than shirking. I can respond separately to each example of effective or disappointing job performance. I can make an objective evaluation of work in my department.

My capacity to notice and analyze strengthened by my inner work, I gradually become acquainted with a dance that is happening at all levels of my agency between a spirit of self-absorbed negligence and the frantic parent of a child in danger. It even extends to the larger society. As our consumer culture becomes more and more opulent, basic social infrastructures decay or sink into mediocrity. Environmental crises loom. We are leaving our children a society far less conducive to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness than the one we have enjoyed. Who knows where to begin reversing this negligence? It seems that only an instance of my department's failure to prevent severe child maltreatment, of the kind described in the news articles quoted earlier, is sufficient to awaken society to its general negligence; and then this negligence is projected onto Child Protection work. Is it surprising that self-absorption resists having its responsibilities brought to its attention or that terrified helplessness flees from awareness of itself?

The inner works I have just done, seeking the essence of these two roles is my effort to empower myself. I offer them as a beginning. I cannot give more: they express the limits of my present ability as a Process Worker in the present state of my organization. My hope is that they will inspire you, the reader to join me: “I can’t do this myself.”

In addition to calling to you the reader, and to the Process Work community of learners, I also want to call to the Tao. I will finish with one last inner work seeking to connect with the essence of the vulnerable child, the secondary role in Child Protection. When I feel this role in my body, I kick and scream at the top of my lungs. I am terrified and enraged, but my energy also expresses a power that few adults could match. I go deeper into this paradox. In the sound of my wailing voice I discover an authority commanding the world: “Come feed me!” “Come hold and pat me!” “Come put on my blanket!” There is a combination of power and powerlessness that surprises and delights me. Going deeper into these qualities, I discover a pure, innocent neediness that is more profoundly natural and wise than my everyday identity. In this role, I call to a parent, to myself, to my coworkers, and to you, the reader, saying “Follow me: I am the way. Do not worry, it is easy and natural to meet my needs.” This is a feeling I have felt after a World Work workshop or while facilitating Family Group Decision Making conferences. This is the spirit that can heal my organization.

Returning from this sentient essence meditation to a consensus reality view of my organization, my faith in my World Work training is renewed, but tempered by an appreciation of the limits of my capacity to apply this training to Child Protection work. I can accept and appreciate my vulnerability, armed only with an imperfectly integrated vision, and at the same time respect the power of “mere” belief. This no dream balancing of possibility and limits is my gift from this research.

**chapter outline for  
SUMMARY AND DIRECTIONS  
FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

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## **SUMMARY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This project opens up a new field of Process Work research. World Work provides unique training for facilitating and participating in group processes, but, following of these trainings, many participants return to groups with consensus reality focuses that take priority over developing awareness or facilitation skills. In addition, World Work alumni may have jobs that do not allow them to bring in any of their World Work learning. As a result, they may suffer disorientation and disappointed hopes. This research represents a beginning at studying these post World Work experiences and developing ways to help World Work alumni integrate their learning while in real work experiences.

In this section I will summarize and evaluate my research. I will first describe the ways I have impacted my organization as a World Work alumnus. Next, I will share how I have personally developed by integrating my World Work experiences. I will then attempt to clarify the nature of this research and analyze what it has and has not accomplished. Finally, I will make suggestions regarding how this research might be unfolded in future projects.

## **MY IMPACT ON MY ORGANIZATION**

There were three phases in my making an impact on my organization. In the first phase, five years after my introduction to World Work, I impacted only coworkers and community partners with whom I interacted directly. These were my hybrid World Worker / Child Protective worker years. A spontaneously occurring integration process happened in me, and, guided by this process, I made some innovations in my Child Protection practice based on World Work values. I learned how to suspend judgment and stay open to the mystery of my clients. I learned how to use my social rank as a professional in a way that was more helpful to my clients. My innovations were sometimes well received and resulted in me gaining a reputation among some coworkers for the special quality of my work. However, these coworkers were only interested in my innovations to the extent that they appeared to contribute to a better realization of established agency goals. During this time, the leadership of my organization was not open to exploring ways to change the culture of Child Protective work. Even if they had been, I as a provider of direct services to clients did

not have authority to propose anything new. In this situation, my innovations could not develop enough momentum to change the culture of Child Protective work in the department as a whole.

I imagine that my experience during this phase was typical of many World Work alumni. It represented the limits of what can be accomplished in a large organization when one is not an administrator and does not have the support of the organization's leadership. I might possibly have had a greater impact in a smaller organization or one with a healthier culture. It would be interesting to research the experiences of World Work returnees to businesses of different size and organizational structure. What factors helped or hindered them in making an impact within their business culture?

In the next phase of my making an impact on my organization, I had the support of working for Family Group Decision Making. This program was strongly supported by my organization's leadership. It was based on values congruent to those of World Work, and these two programs complemented each other. On one hand, FGDM gave me a role that officially sanctioned me to bring World Work values to the practice of Child Protective work. On the other hand, my World Work training helped me adapt to the radically new demands of this role. The following excerpts from letters of commendation by coworkers attests to the impact I was able to have in these circumstances:

Doug began offering Family Group Decision Making conferences in our office over three years ago, when none of us had any experience with this new social work tool. For several years, he was the only representative of this program in this office. He was our teacher and guide to a new way of working with families, and he showed an exceptional leadership in bringing F.G.D. M. to his former coworkers on the line. He was obviously passionate about F.G.D.M., and he explained this new tool with an enthusiasm that was inspiring. As this program continues to grow, and family meetings become more a part of our way of doing social work, Doug continues to provide valuable guidance, helping his colleagues grow in their understanding of this tool.

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In the area of interpersonal/oral communication skills, Doug Hales' work can only be described as outstanding. I have personally witnessed him facilitating meetings among clients of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and have observed that he always works in a sensitive and caring manner. He takes time to ensure that every participant in the conference feels heard and understood. Furthermore, he is very adept at ensuring that the participants listen carefully to and understand each other's points. Because the families we serve frequently have long-standing patterns of



dysfunction and poor communication, this is an impressive achievement. Doug has a kind and non-confrontational communication style, which increases the participants' feelings of safety and confidence in the process.

. . . . .

In my experience of Mr. Hales as an F.G.D.M. facilitator, he has shown a remarkable ability to empower people, (peers and clients) to make their own decisions with his support and guidance. His extraordinary patience certainly adds to his overall effectiveness.

. . . . .

In his way of relating to colleagues and families, Doug Hales very effectively models the underlying values of a partnership-based way of doing social work.

During this time, I had many gratifying successes. The lesson of this phase seems to be that World Work prepares an individual to respond effectively when an opportunity appears on a systematic level. After I had struggled for years to integrate two different paradigms, it was remarkably easy for me to adapt to a work assignment based on values congruent with World Work. This was my stage of being a World Work entrepreneur, skilled in taking initiative in a situation when many other people were struggling to re-think old ways of working. I imagine that my experience in this phase is similar to other World Work alumni who are given an opportunity to work in programs that are similar to World Work in their philosophies. This would be another interesting area of research.

In my current phase of developing an impact on my organization, I am suffering disappointments and setbacks. The Family Group Decision Making program has provoked a backlash, and I am caught up in a social field wracked with conflicts on the relationship and systemic levels. In the first phase, I had been ignored; here, I am recognized but treated like a threat to the department's homeostasis. To cope with this opposition, which is typically covert, I need more awareness of my organization and greater fluidity in groups. I developed this research project to fill this need.

This is my phase of being a World Work guerilla: driven out of the capital, I have retreated to the mountains to recoup. One of my greatest successes in this phase has been developing a project outside the department. All over the world, the Family Group Decision Making programs that have survived the vicissitudes of organizational politics have had community support. It makes sense that the community is proving to be a special ally to this program: Family Group Decision Making was originally developed to heal the poor relations

between Child Protective agencies and the community. In my department, this healing has a long way to go. We have begun to develop relationships with outside agencies, but these are still mainly business relationships, based on contracts through which the department pays agencies for specified services. They are not yet relationships of full collaboration in which agencies are invited to contribute as equals with my department in defining the mission of protecting children. My agency's neglect of the community has created an opening for me to make friends and create allies for Family Group Decision Making program.

Inspired by this opportunity, I created professional development training for psychological service providers in the community. This training is aimed at therapists some of whose clients are also clients of the department. As such there is a good possibility that they will someday participate in a Family Group Decision Making conference. My training is aimed at empowering these service providers to take part, not just in a business arrangement, but in a journey of spiritual renewal for the department. As part of this training, I created a hand out entitled "Guidelines for Therapists on Participating in a Family Conference with Child Protective Services" which concludes with the following recommendation:

... the department is committed to forming partnerships with community service providers like yourself to give families the best possible service. However a particular conference may not go as far as you think it could in fulfilling the county's commitment. It is hoped that these guidelines will support you, as the therapist of one of the family members, to advocate for your client and the values of your profession during a family conference. Families and the department need your full participation for this new direction of child protective work to fulfill its promise. \*

This statement advances the values of World Work in my agency by reaching out to a marginalized role in the field and giving it support to express itself fully so that it can contribute to the group knowing itself. I have stepped outside the agency that employs me and I am empowering an outside agency to challenge my department to begin to stop seeing itself as the center of the Child Protection universe.

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\* I have included only one passage from my handout here so as not to disrupt the flow of the discussion. The entire handout is included in an appendix on page 96.

The lesson of this phase seems to be that it is possible for an individual to sometimes impact an organization, bringing it more into alignment with World Work values, but this requires a disciplined effort to integrating one's World Work learning. It also requires what Process Work calls a no dream attitude, a view that balances inspiration and a "sadder but wiser" recognition of the problems realizing a dream. I have not succeeded as a Family Group Decision Making facilitator as much as I originally hoped. Similarly, in this research project, I did not succeed as much as I originally hoped in creating adaptations of World Work tools to do inner work within a consensus reality work setting. However, adopting a No Dream perspective, I have succeeded enough in both these tasks to continue making some impact on my agency and the larger community.

## MY PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM THIS PROJECT

In this section, I will describe my progress in healing my personal culture shock through this research. My years of service in Child Protection have been a time of apprenticeship as a world worker in a consensus reality organization. My qualified success in making an impact on my organization has been secondary to my successes in integrating my World Work learning. I have developed personally in all three of my post World Work stages. In the first stage, an integration process occurred by itself, independent of my conscious intention. This secondary process expressed itself in symptoms of culture shock, and on-the-job daydreaming. In the second stage, I developed personally through the richness of my interactions with coworkers and outside communities that I experienced while facilitating Family Group Decision Making Conferences. Marginalized families and the work I was privileged to do were my guides to integrating World Work. In the current phase, my personal development has come from making a space for myself as student, setting a primary process intention to focus on integrating my World Work learning. I committed myself to the disciplined activity of journaling, and I explored how some of the concepts and tools of Process Work and World Work could provide templates for inner work to develop greater awareness of my organization.

Although I have been humbled to discover the limits to what one lone person can do in developing awareness of group process, I have been gratified that I have received some personal benefit from my inner work. With the help of this project, I have survived a

departmental revolution and counter revolution, and I am ready to respond to any future opportunities, either in Child Protective services or in some other organization. I have demonstrated to myself, and I hope to you, the reader, that an alumnus of World Work can take charge of integrating his experience in less than supportive work settings.

The Process Work concept High Dream / Low Dream / No Dream has been especially helpful to me in working with my experiences in Child Protection work. High Dream is an idealizing state in which a person focuses on positive aspects of their situation and is optimistic about achieving success. I imagine that most World Work alumni re-enter their daily lives in this state. At first, I was inspired anew with the aspirations for Child Protection Work that motivated me to join the department. Later, I was very enthusiastic about the possibilities of applying World Work to doing Family Group Decision Making. The dream of transforming Child Protection through the combination of these two works has exerted an almost hypnotic power over me for several years. I had high hopes for this research. Later, as I developed this research project, I had the high dream of producing a paper that would be used in training Process Workers, perhaps in the Master of Arts in Conflict Resolution program. I still dream that my work here will help open an area of research that will result in new tools supporting World Work alumni to integrate their learning. I acknowledge and thank these ideals. Who would want to live without sometimes being in love with someone or something?

My experience in Child Protection also has brought me into low dream states. In this state, one's attention is focused on negative aspects and one is pessimistic about achieving success. The many dysfunctions of my department sometimes make me hopeless that it can be reformed. Other times I am appalled at the insensitivity with which some coworkers use their power over families. I remember a family conference attempting to rectify a failure of the professionals to prevent an adolescent victimized by sexual abuse from being returned by the courts to her abuser. The adolescent was clearly damaged from her abuse: she had developed the habit of cutting herself. Her pain, however, was not enough to inhibit two professionals in the meeting, embarrassed by their failure in this case, from attempting to blame the adolescent. I had another low dream experience when management assigned me to my current supervisor and then supported her to undermine the values of community partnership and a family centered practice. However, thanks to my journaling and inner work

I can now acknowledge and thank these disillusioning experiences. They have contributed to my personal development by goading me to become more aware.

Finally, this work has provided opportunities to learn about the No Dream state. I am in this state when I can appreciate the attractiveness of a vocational ideal without needing to be convinced I can achieve it or when I can continue to appreciate some aspects of a work situation even after I have realized that it will probably never meet all my needs. I am grateful for the experiences of detachment and freedom – maturity - that have come to me while in a No Dream state. Writing this paper has many times taken me to this state: this has been a motivator to sit at my computer working on it. I can feel myself sliding back into High Dream as I write this: I hope this paper will teach some readers more about No Dream and inspire them to learn more about how World Work can take them into this state.

## THE NATURE OF THIS RESEARCH AND WHAT IT HAS ACCOMPLISHED

I have come to see this research project as only secondarily an exploration of ways to adapt World Work tools to inner work. Primarily it is a diary inspired by nostalgia, an attempt to share about an experience of re-entry in a way that inspires other World Work alumni to pay more attention to their experience, a meditation on the relationship between self-support and being supported by a group. It feels important to emphasize that this project is only a beginning, an act of second attention, a focusing on experiences that appear to have been ignored by the Process Work learning community. I value my research, not for what it has achieved, but for what it has attempted. I made space for a student, a diarist, a speculator, and this to some degree advanced my integration of my World Work learning and helped me achieve more awareness and fluidity in my organization. I will be gratified if any readers are inspired to use my inner work explorations as a starting point for explorations of their own.

## A LIST OF SUGGESTIONS

Readers of this paper will make their own decisions about which aspects of my work they are interested in developing further. To support your selection process, I want here to

reduce my post-World Work experiences and learning to a list of suggestions. I continue to seek ways to follow these suggestions myself.

- 1) Pay attention to symptoms of “poor” work performance that hint that an organically occurring integration process is happening to you. Are you daydreaming about World Work on your job, even to a point that is causing you to be alienated from fully engaging in your assigned tasks? Do you seek all available opportunities to talk about World Work to your coworkers, or are you driven to de-brief about your work with coworkers in a way that seeks to expand everyone’s awareness of what you are doing? (People may tease you about this or in other ways communicate to you that they are not interested in your overtures. They may, for example, tell you that you are “complicating” issues that are “simple.”) Are you tempted to “bend the rules,” in completing work assignments, re-designing them to conform to World Work values? Do you find yourself newly critical or rejecting of certain former ways of working? Are you resistant to staying within the rules and limits of your businesses organizational structure? (This is a potentially dangerous “symptom”: consider that your rebelliousness may be an expression of Low Dreaming that could get you in trouble if you don’t learn to express it with awareness.) Do you notice any particular aspect of your organization’s culture that has begun to annoy you? Maybe take the time to write about this aspect. These “symptoms” are seeds that could sprout into focused integration projects of the type I have attempted in this research.
- 2) Believe in the attractiveness of the World Work values that have taken possession of you. Find ways to share your experiences with workers and pay careful, respectful attention to the feedback you get. This activity can be the basis of a relationship-building, ally-creating process that could be the start of you making an impact on your organization. However, do not expect everyone to be interested in World Work values.... Learning how to read others’ feedback is a very important part of integrating your experience in relationship.
- 3) Support yourself to be creative in deviating, even if only in little ways, from established procedures of your job. In many instances, these procedures will themselves be deviations that have developed over time through your organization’s negligence toward its mission. Be a World Work guerilla. Fly under the radar. You could start something small that could unexpectedly evolve into something big.

- 4) Apply the concept of High Dream / Low Dream / No Dream to all your experiences. Learn to assess which state you are in. Learn to appreciate and be grateful for the gifts of each state, but also learn to beware of the limits of each state. Seek to become fluid in allowing one state to flow into the other.
- 5) Believe in your longing to re-create the community of learners that you experienced in World Work. Remember that any person in your field may potentially have something of importance for the group. Be open to allowing that person to show herself to you. In my practice of Family Group Decision Making, my most powerful teachers have been individuals, often not even formally related to family but “merely” family friends, who have been included in meetings as an afterthought. They brought solutions outside the frame of reference of any of the professionals.

## HOPES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

I closing, I hope the reader will contact me to share your own explorations of post World Work experiences. I have a high dream of a focus group, maybe online, where we could learn from each other. Finally, I would be very grateful if Arny or other teachers in the community are inspired by this paper to develop tools or trainings to support post World Work integration in work settings.

**appendix:**  
**GUIDELINES FOR THERAPISTS**  
**ON PARTICIPATING IN A FAMILY CONFERENCE WITH**  
**THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services is currently utilizing a variety of family conferencing approaches. A client of yours may someday be asked to participate in one of these conferences, and you may be invited to participate as part of her support system. A family conference is an opportunity for your client to receive a kind of treatment that is more associated with therapy than with traditional child protective work. This paper offers guidelines to help you be as effective as possible in contributing to the realization of this opportunity.

Family conferencing approaches differ in the extent to which they give the family a voice in the decision making process. In addition, particular facilitators may differ in the extent to which they create a space for family participation. The attached Family Involvement Continuum chart shows the range of possibilities that you and your client may encounter in a meeting. This paper will present guidelines that should be useful to you in whatever kind of conference you encounter.

Participating in a family conference will give you the opportunity to advocate for the following values:

1) The value of client centered practice. Families are the experts on themselves. It is important for all professionals taking part in a family conference to guard against the tendency to privilege professionals and their jargon at the expense of the family's sharing. You are one of these professionals, but you are one with a special role in supporting your client to discover for themselves a way out of their problems. As such, you can make a special contribution to keeping this conference client centered. You are encouraged to advocate vigorously for this value.

2) The value of community centered practice. In general, the more family and community support persons participate in a conference the better. Sheer numbers help a family assert itself in a meeting with professionals. In addition, a variety of



perspectives helps the conference achieve a multi-dimensional picture of the family, balancing strengths and challenges. Finally, when the full support system shares an empowerment experience, there is a more lasting change in the family's relationship with the department. It is recommended that you encourage your clients to set aside personal differences and invite all family members and community support persons who have a stake in their children's welfare.

3) The value of informed consent. Families need and are entitled to clear and accurate information about the child protective system and their place in it. This includes information about why the family came to the department's attention, what the department or court's final determination is of the problems they need to correct, what the court has ordered them to do to correct these problems, and how much time they have to complete these orders. You and your client need this information to help your client successfully negotiate a complex and challenging system. It is recommended that you participate vigorously in all discussions aimed at clarifying these issues.

Certain tools are used in most forms of family conferencing. These guidelines are aimed at helping you use these tools skillfully so that you can advocate effectively for the values described above. These tools are:

1) Usually at the beginning of a conference, the department makes a presentation of the family's problems and/or a statement of the purpose of the conference. You are encouraged to be assertive in standing for your and your client's right to understand and participate in defining these matters.

2) Most conferences use the tool of listing the family's strengths. You may already employ some strength based tools in your work with clients. It is recommended that you have a discussion of strengths with your client before the conference. The following are family strengths sometimes identified in a conference:

- Your client's bond with her child (giving specific evidence of this bond)
- Your client's ability to work with outside help and follow through with recommendations (include instances demonstrating this)
- Your client's general level of functioning in the world (give examples)

- Your client's insight about her problems
- Any information you have regarding strengths in your client's support system

3) Most conferences use the tool listing concerns about the family. Generally, this list guides the family's case plan and the level of supervision the family receives. You can make an important contribution to insuring that this list is as complete, accurate as possible and that it contributes to a fair assessment of the severity of your client's problems. In preparing for a meeting, you are encouraged to work with your client in identifying relevant concerns. Discuss in advance how you will participate in identifying these concerns. On one hand, your confidential relationship with your client could limit how much you say; on the other hand your role as a support person might argue for you to say more.

In summary, the different conferencing formats that the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services is utilizing at this time are one sign that the department is committed to forming partnerships with community service providers like yourself to give families the best possible service. However a particular conference may not go as far as you think it could in fulfilling the county's commitment. It is hoped that these guidelines will support you, as the therapist of one of the family members, to advocate for your client and the values of your profession during a family conference. Families and the department need your full participation for this new direction of child protective work to fulfill its promise.

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