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LEARNING ABOUT BILINGUAL, MULTICULTURAL ORGANIZING

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INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism and Community Organization

     This paper is a reflection on several years' struggle to establish a federation of
housing cooperatives in a low-income, multi-ethnic, bilingual community in Los Angeles.
The history of this organization has significant implications for the study of
multicultural organization in general, and for the modeling of multicultural, as opposed
to assimilative or pluralistic, society. The concept of multiculturalism has grown in
importance as the melting pot myths of the past and shortcomings of pluralism are fully
exposed.
     Los Angeles, the scene of our case study, is a city in which national racial
minorities--chiefly Hispanics, blacks, and Asians--have become a local majority
(Adler 1983a:482). For Angeleno Hispanics particularly, the mechanisms for assimilation
to the dominant culture have been weak: language and cultural maintenance are supported
by ethnic segregation, the physical proximity of Latin America, and by a dense network
of Hispanic businesses, communications media and social institutions of all kinds
(Conklin and Lourie 1983; Giles et al. 1977).   Cultural pluralism (that is,
competitive monocultural organization) has not offered a satisfactory alternative route
to full social entitlement: externally, racism limits entry into the central arena of
power, while internally, Hispanics are divided by socioeconomic class, national origin,
citizenship   status, length of residence in the United States and degree of
assimilation to the dominant Anglo culture.
     Importantly, many of the goals of low-income Hispanic communities (such as crime
prevention, adequate housing and access to public services), are shared with the
contiguous or intermingled communities of other ethnic groups. Organization along strict
ethnic lines means fragmentation, and competition for scarce resources.   Each minority
must direct its demands, in isolation, to the dominant culture, thus minimizing minority
interaction and contributing to the maintenance of the status quo.   To be effective in
an environment such as Los Angeles, it is our contention that organizing for change just
shed the traditional models of assimilation and pluralism and employ multiculturalism.

Active community organizers have stated this new multicultural imperative quite dramatically, and generalized it to the national scale. Jose N. Molina (1978) writes that "as a breath of fresh air blowing throughout the organizational field, a new trend is now in motion in this country--in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Arkansas, North Carolina, Connecticut and elsewhere. I am referring to multiethnic, multiracial majority constituency organization." Other organizers, such as Miller (1974) and Deleeuw (1974), concur.

There is support other than the reports of practitioners for arguing the growing national importance of multicultural organization. The special conditions in a city such as Los Angeles may prefigure the outcome of more generalized societal changes. The advanced industrial countries are undergoing a well-publicized shift to an information and service-based economy; at the same time, there persists a much longer-term trend to increasing bureaucratization and social regulation. John J. Gumperz (1976; 1978) has argued that these changes mean the end of plural urban society: pressed by increasing demands for frequent, detailed and sustained personal communication both in the workplace and in negotiating for public services, the urban ethnic can no longer remain protected in a cultural enclave, represented to the society at large by elite or paternal figures from that same enclave.

The changes which have rendered the old forms of interethnic relations impossible, or at least undesirable, at once suggest a new form: a form in which different ethnicities maintain their identities, but engage in extensive interaction and mutual influence; a form in which relations between single minorities and the dominant culture are complemented by organized interaction among minorities; a form in which members of ethnic communities become to some extent multicultural, able and willing to communicate and cooperate across cultural boundaries. This emergent form of interethnic relations and organization is what we mean by the multicultural model, or multiculturalism.

Intermediating Roles in Multicultural Organizing

The multicultural institution is, at the most general level, an organization like any other, a formal arrangement for interaction toward common goals. To interact, participants must communicate; to communicate, they must have both the ability and the motivation to do so (Simard and Taylor 1975). Impediments to this ability and motivation can arise from a great variety of causes: for example, from interpersonal conflict, intergroup rivalry, or differences in norms, values and perceptions. Such impediments can be addressed by the intervention of a third party with the specific attitudes, skills or knowledge to facilitate understanding and common action between the participants (Taft 1981). All organizations, accordingly, have persons in "boundary roles" who knowingly or unknowingly, formally or informally, serve this intermediating function.1 The more complex the organization, the more likely these roles will be explicitly recognized and formalized (Dinges and Maynard 1983; Adams 1976; 1980; Kellers and Holland 1975; Lawrence and Lorsch 1967).

In the case of a low-income community organization that spans several ethnicities and more than one language, these roles take on special urgency, and will benefit from formal definition and careful allocation. From a broad survey of the intercultural literature, we have identified three such inter- mediating functions appropriate to the multicultural, bilingual community organization: the roles of organizer, interpreter and cultural mediator. Conceptually, these roles are not strictly exclusive categories, but shade into one another; and in practice there will also be some overlap. Each role, however, calls for distinct and highly demanding personal qualifications of its own. For this reason, and because conflicts of interest and over concentrations of power can occur when they are combined, we will argue that the three are best understood as separate functions and allocated to different persons. We will now turn to a review of the theoretical literature on these functions, before recounting how the three roles came to be separately identified and allocated in the case history reviewed in this article.

Organizers. The professional organizer is the traditional mediator between low-income community organizations and society at large. Such communities are distinguished from the dominant society along a number of dimensions. Differences in wealth, education and occupational status put the low-income community at a disadvantage in the communication-related skills of group process, political confrontation and formal negotiation. The imbalance in skills and resources in reinforced and perpetuated over time by a complex of attitudes that amount to an almost insurmountable motivational

barrier: suspicion and hostility toward the professional-managerial class and cynicism about politics are coupled with an internalized sense of powerlessness, a naivete about the actual processes of political influence, and an almost paradoxical loyalty to established authority figures and to the American political system as a whole. Activism, in the main, is limited to rare and short-lived outbursts (Fellman 1973).

For these reasons, the low-income community will typically need some outside intervention in order to form a permanent and effective organization. At the same time, the organization's role as community advocate in an adversary political system makes autonomy a paramount issue, and therefore limits the type and extent of acceptable mediation. Guidance by experts or authorities can too easily be a guise for cooptation or domination.

In these circumstances, the organizer's art is to walk the line between suggestion and manipulation: to discover the community's agenda, rather than advocate his own; to identify, rather than select, the natural and locally validated leadership; to formalize the lines and linkages of already-existing interaction, rather than to impose a textbook organizational structure; and above all, to train and reinforce his own replacements. The organizer is a stimulant, a catalyst, a mobilizer, an enabler, a trainer; and as these terms suggest, the role is temporary. Once the motivational barriers are overcome, once the political/managerial skills are imparted and experience begins to accumulate, the organizer's mediating role between community and society devolves upon the local leadership developed in the process (Alinsky 1969; Kahn 1970; Molina 1978; Twelvetrees 1982).

When the issue is to bridge cultural or language differences within the community, the prescription is again for the organizer to fill these roles while seeking out or developing local, organic mediators: in this case, "natural cross-links" who have the status ability and willingness to cross social boundaries that others cannot (Molina 1978). How persons are developed for these roles is not well specified in the literature, since most organizing has taken place in monocultural communities.

The organizer's role is difficult even without the additional burdens of multiculturalism. Any effective organizer must be able to bridge the inter-group biases and differences contained in all organizations in a verbal style that accommodates working and professional classes; must have an ability to motivate active participation while recognizing and developing organic leadership; and must be sufficiently committed to social ideals to undertake what is at once a demanding, relatively low-paying, and (because of its phasing-out quality) always self-effacing job. Multiculturalism and bilingualism add to this list the complex skills needed by the interpreter and cultural mediator. Having the rigorous qualifications needed for effectiveness in all three of these roles seems too much to expect of any one person.

Interpreters. Monolingualism in a multicultural environment is the most obvious and absolute of communication barriers. The most commonly proposed solutions to this problem are language training and interpretation. Language training is expensive, and is a long term process that does not satisfy immediate organizational communication needs. Additionally, as Taylor and Simard note (1975), even the development of a high degree of functional bilingualism among the membership does not by itself guarantee a high degree of social interaction between ethnic groups.

The alternative of interpretation, while conceptually sufficient, requires a greater skill level than is usually available to most groups, particularly when the audience includes a multiplicity of nationalities and local dialects, and when the material to be translated is technically difficult even in the source language. Interpretation is considerably more sensitive and complex than mere code switching. It implies conveying the meaning of the words that are used as those words are modified by actual tone, gesture, and context; it is, therefore, situation-specific, employing "fleeting equivalents" suited only to the particular audience and verbal performance. When familiarity with all the differences of culture, class, and gender contained in the audience, as well as technical competence in the subject matter (Seleskovitch 1976).

In the search for situational and audience-specific equivalents, an interpreter must call on knowledge of the contextualization cues which allow listeners from different backgrounds to sort out the ambiguities of tone, mood and intent. Disastrous confusions of meaning can result from misuse or misunderstanding of non-verbal signals such as posture, gaze direction, facial xpression and body movements; paraverbal signals such as intonation, tempo and loudness of speech; and the implicit semantics of technical jargon or dialect. The sum of these cues, together with strictly

verbal content and pre-suppositions drawn from the context (physical location, social setting, history of encounter between the participants), will determine the specific meaning drawn from what is said (Brislin 1980; Conklin and Lourie 1983: 262-276; Gumperz 1976, 1982).

Since the interpreter's bilingualism is critical to mutual action, she is in a position of considerable leverage even if she holds no other office; she affects the pattern of interaction among participants, can amplify or mute conflicts, can influence outcomes.   If the interpreter is committed to resolution and problem solving, she can suppress emotional content and prevent conflicting claims from initiating a destructive cycle of provocation and counter-provocation. If the interpreter becomes involved in the issues she can, conversely, exacerbate the conflict. Such bias, rather than "faithful representation," may in some specific situations meet immediate organizational development needs; but if it is seen as abuse by either side in a conflict, partisanship threatens the trust essential to successfully fulfilling the interpreter's role (Anderson 1976:215-221).

Because of the complexity of the task, the requirement of perceived neutrality, and the intrinsic leverage of the position, it is questionable whether an attempt should be made to combine the interpreter's role with that of the organizer. The organizer's task is itself difficult, and the organizer is definitely a purposeful actor. This intentionality can, and very likely will, impact the interpretation. Problems of concentration of power and the risk of loss of trust both seem to dictate the separation of these roles and their allocation to professionals in the respective fields.

Cultural mediators. The role of cultural mediator, unlike the professional roles of organizer and interpreter, requires the combination of organizational membership with an extraordinarily intimate bicultural familiarity. The role begins at the borders of that of the interpreter, with the mediator overcoming communication barriers by explaining culturally bound role expectations, behaviors, values and perceptions. It extends to include leadership functions appropriate only to group members, with the mediator overcoming motivational barriers by actively reconciling culturally opposed viewpoints, and winning personal trust and commitment from the membership (Bochner 1981).

One of the tasks of the mediator is to grasp and convey certain kinds of meaning that may be beyond the limits of an interpreter's competence. Experiential equivalents are in this category: references to everyday objects, events and stereotypes that depend upon shared experience. To find semantic equivalents for metaphors or allegories requires the mediator's knowledge of the actual conditions of living in a specific culture, as distinct from the interpreter's knowledge of its linguistic conventions (Sechrist et al. 1972).

A still broader field for the mediator is the adjustment of role and behavioral expectations between ethnicities (Taft 1981:56). Expectations as to the behavior and roles appropriate to given situations decide, by convention, issues such as who approaches whom, whether appeal is to reason or sympathy, whether demeanor is assertive or humble, whether etiquette is formal or casual, whether topics are intimate or impersonal. Errors in communicative deportment of this kind are especially serious, because they will be seen not as simple misunderstandings, but as breaches of conduct attributable to attitude or character. The mediator is the person who determines the intentionality of a cultural faux pas and leads the group either in rage or friendly laughter in such moments.

In both the foregoing instances, the emphasis is on communication, on proper understanding to clear up misconceptions or remove subjective factors from a true substantive disagreement. The emphasis of mediation sometimes shifts to motivation, and to action. Not all disagreements, or all failures of multicultural interaction, are due to miscommunication. Many breakdowns in interaction are rather a result of the deliberate choice not to interact, based on attitudes ranging from discomfort with outsiders to prejudice.

Bias of some degree between cultural groups is a social universal for which numerous causes are proposed in the literature (Bochner 1982; Giles et a1.1977; Tajfel 1974).It is also proposed that the likelihood of reducing bias through intergroup contact can be increased by certain favorable social conditions and institutional arrangements, perhaps the most important of which is the existence of superordinate goals--needs common to more than one group, which require mutual action (Kleinberg 1982; Serif et al. 1961; Taylor and Simard 1975). In the face of bias, however, recognition of this mutuality may require the intervention of a mediator.

If cooperation between groups where bias and disagreement exist is to be actively mediated, that role is best allocated to persons who can claim full cultural membership in both the groups to be mediated. Persons who have achieved within themselves a transcendence of bias and a reconciliation of culturally contrary viewpoints are best suited to reproduce these characteristics in the organization (Bochner 1981; Taft 1981).

Such bicultural membership implies not only abstract knowledge of the cultures to be mediated, but, most importantly, it implies internalizing the cultures' rules and responses to the point that emotional reactions are appropriate and genuine. It is not enough to abstractly appreciate that a particular remark is an insult or a joke. The mediator, as a cultural member, must feel the insult or get the joke and ensure that everyone understands its meaning. It is this unique ability that allows the mediator to bond with all elements of the membership and bring them closer to bonding with each other (Taft 1981).2

As a final note on this role, we can cite Stephen Bochner's argument that cultures are more complex even than languages, with each of us fully at home only in a fragment of our own culture. Consequently, cultural mediation must be highly individualized and narrowly focused; "mediators will be able to link only between certain specific segments of the societies they straddle," and we can expect that an organization composed of several subcultures will require many persons in the cultural mediating role, relative to the number of interpreters or organizers (1981:13).

In sum, cultural mediating is chiefly distinguished from interpreting by the focus on behavioral in addition to verbal meanings, and by the active, creative reconciliation of opposing demands and views, as contrasted with the interpreter's professional neutrality. Cultural mediating is further distinguished from interpreting, and from organizing, by the absolute requirement of biculturalism. The mediator's focus on cultural relations between subgroups contrasts with the organizer's broad responsibility to the organization as a whole. Finally, the mediator must be an active member, if not leader, in the organization.The organizer's role, by comparison, is relatively depersonalized, professional, and self-effacing, aiming always towards the day when internal leadership takes full control of the organization.

Case History: Route 2

Our synthesis of the literature has been heavily influenced by an analysis of a federation of five housing cooperatives in the Echo Park- Silverlake district of Los Angeles.3 The cooperatives have an extraordinarily mixed ethnic resident population which has struggled for years to overcome the problems of cultural diversity and bilingualism.

Because of their direct-democratic form cooperatives are an excellent environment in which to study the problems presented in this paper. In a cooperative, active participation and intense collective interaction are not simply ideals that may or may not be honored, but are everyday operational necessities. As a result, very difficult problems, which might be passed over in the name of expediency in many other forms of organization seeking a multicultural base, must be confronted and solved. Policy making is "bottom up" rather than "top down"; solutions to problems must be synthesized from the popular base rather than imposed upon it (Adler 1983b: 362; Harris and Moran 1979).

The cooperatives and the federation came about in an unusual way. The State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) purchased a swath of property through the Echo Park-Silverlake area in the late 1960's with plans to extend the already existing Route 2 freeway. The area is an older inner-ring suburb about two miles from downtown Los Angeles, fully developed with wood frame houses, Spanish revival buildings, many duplexes and small 1950's apartment buildings. Caltrans purchased over 200 parcels of property providing housing to well over 1500 residents. Caltrans rented out the properties while waiting for orders to proceed with demolitions, keeping rents low, doing virtually no maintenance, and earning itself the reputation of being the region's biggest slumlord.

The resident population was about 60 percent Latino immigrants and about 25 percent Anglo, with the remainder of the population split equally between Chicanos, blacks and Asians. The Latino immigrant population was made up of people from some 14 Latin countries. In order of frequency, the countries represented include Mexico, Cuba, Guatemala, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, Costa Rica, Columbia, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Panama and Argentina. Functional bilinguals were rare in the

overall population. Most of the residents were monolingual with the split between English and Spanish speakers about equal.

In 1975 the State decided not to extend the Route 2 freeway after all and announced plans to sell the property they had purchased on the open market. Residents of the corridor objected that such a sale could result in the loss of their homes and petitioned the State for the right to buy the property themselves. Caltrans refused, setting off a series of events leading to the formation of the cooperatives.

The process had three stages. The first stage consisted of mobilization and social action to win the right to buy the property. The second stage involved forming a development corporation, setting up the individual cooperatives and the cooperative federation, and buying and rehabilitating the property. The third stage focused on long term, permanent administration of the cooperatives and maintenance of the property.

In the first stage, the problem of winning the right to buy the property eclipsed emergent problems of multiculturalism and bilingualism. In the second stage, these problems became more evident, but the technical demands of the purchase and rehabilitation process overwhelmed all other concerns. In the third stage, operation of the cooperatives, the problems presented by multi-culturalism and a bilingual environment became crucial to the success of the projects and were, finally, fully addressed.

Mobilization and Social Action

In response to the threat of displacement from their homes and the refusal of the State to sell them the property, the residents of the corridor formed a Tenants' Association. The initial activists of the purchase movement were Cuban immigrants, and a bilingual Cuban, who often served as translator at meetings, was elected president of the group at an open meeting of corridor residents. A monolingual English-speaking black woman was the vice president. The leadership was clearly multiethnic, but Latino immigrants other than the Cubans were noticeably absent from the group's steering committee.

Much of the work of the Tenants' Association was done by the steering committee in endless meetings with various bureaucrats and politicians. To the outside world it seemed to be a very multiethnic group acting in solidarity. Only those aware of the internal workings of the group would have known there were problems. The kinds of frictions that emerged in this period revealed internal differences in communicative style and behavioral expectations. There was violent argument over whether the formal Spanish style of the urban Cubans or the rural Spanish style of the peasant Mexicans should be used in fliers and newsletters. Divisive passions over cultural and class insults also abounded. For example, a group of very low-income Latino residents, who lived in overcrowded quarters without open space, felt deliberately snubbed when they were invited to a summer organizing party held in a much higher-income neighbors' backyard rather than in the hosts' spacious house.5

Mass action was often threatened but was only rarely employed. The biggest action ever taken consisted of a rent strike, in response to Caltran's attempt to impose a 25 percent rent increase on the residents of the corridor, with the apparent hope that it would chase out many of the tenants. The Association countered with demands for repair of the property and for a freezing of the rents to prevent displacement while the negotiations about buying the property were continuing. Residents were called upon to refuse to pay the increase.

While no one outside Caltrans could measure the rate of participation in the strike, rumor had it that 80 percent of the tenants went along. The rumor may have been true, because the strike was successful. It resulted in the State doing a great deal of repair to the property and accepting a compromise agreement that rents, in no case, could be raised to exceed 25 percent of tenant's income. Winning the strike went a long way in further establishing the credibility of the leadership.

The Association's years of negotiation, threat and action reached a successful conclusion in 1979 when State legislation was passed, giving the residents the right to buy the property, and also providing that the sales prices must be affordable to the residents to prevent their involuntary displacement.6 The residents in single family houses were to buy their homes individually while all multifamily property was to be sold to a development corporation with the responsibility of rehabilitating the property and organizing the cooperatives.

Developing the Cooperatives and the Federation

   With this victory, the next step in the process was for the tenant leadership to set about forming the development corporation called for under the new law and organizing the residents into cooperative groupings. A small grant was obtained from the State to hire a single organizer, called a coop education specialist. The response to advertisements for this unusual position was light. A bilingual Mexican woman, educated in this country, with some organizing experience, was chosen for the position. Out of necessity, this individual had to play the three roles we have described: organizer, interpreter, and multicultural mediator.
   Later, the group was to obtain greater funding, but the pattern of encapsulating three roles in one, established by the initial limits on funding, was to persist for some time. In the period that followed, which covered about four years, there were from one to three paid people in this multiple role. The people had various ethnic backgrounds: the next two people hired were Chicanas; two people who later worked part-time were Cubanos, and, towards the end of this period, a Puertorriqueno was hired.
   None of these people were professionally trained organizers, although several of them had had jobs that involved organizing before.7 They had varying degrees of bilingualism, some being stronger in English and others in Spanish. Only one had been a paid translator. The degree to which they were cultural mediators is difficult to judge. At times, it seemed that some of these organizers saw themselves as monocultural advocates and brokers rather than mediators. Their pay, as with most organizers, was modest, ranging from $12,000 to $20,000 depending on background and length of stay.
   The initial board of the development corporation was primarily made up of those members of the Tenants' Association steering committee that lived in multifamily housing. Unfortunately, while the board remained multiethnic, this meant that the new board lacked most of its former Latino members and bilingual capacity. Most of the Latino leadership lived in single-family houses that were not to be part of the cooperatives. The residents of the multifamily properties were, however, still 60 percent Latino and heavily monolingual.   This left a largely English-speaking, non-Latino board leading a majority immigrant Latino, bilingual community.
   In this period the leadership was expanded, with the help of the organizers. Boards were formed for the individual cooperatives and federated into the board of the development corporation, the property was purchased, and the rehabilitation started, but the ethnic composition of the leadership did not change. Whites, blacks, Asians and Chicanos were represented, but Latinos, meaning the immigrant Latin population, were not.   The Latino population, in the main, was going along with the process, but at a distance.
   The major Latino leadership that did emerge attempted to organize against the project. The experience of fighting off an attack on the project began to educate the English-speaking leadership in the federation about the interpretation element of what it might take to involve the Latinos. A group of Cuban residents, along with a black resident of the multifamily property, objected strongly to the collective, non-speculative arrangement by which they were to buy their property. They wanted the same private property rights as the people who lived in single-family property. This meant the right to buy the multifamily property they lived in and, if necessary, to become the landlords of neighbors who could not afford to participate in the purchase. This later option was objectionable to the cooperative leadership, and they refused to sell off parcels to individuals in the fashion demanded.
   The protesters passed a petition throughout the corridor with various charges against the leadership, including anti-Latino bias, and called for an investigation. The response of the leadership, who felt they were on the moral high ground, was to call a mass meeting to have it out with the protesters. The meeting was well attended and intense. The leadership had in the past relied on either the organizers or a bilingual member to translate at meetings, but the importance and expected complexity of this meeting seemed to call for a professional translator. A court-certified interpreter was hired and contributed extraordinarily to the meeting, creating clarity and calming people down to the point that communication was possible.
   The meeting seemed to sway the mass support away from the protesters and to the leadership. Very little more than the meeting ever came of the protesters' efforts, but the leadership noted the value of having a "real" interpreter and lamented not being able to afford such a person at all their meetings. From time to time, Latino residents had come to a meeting and asked for an "independent" translator at board meetings.

Unfortunately, the board took the word independent in its accusatory sense and became defensive. Later, they were to gain a fuller understanding of what the Latinos wanted and change their position, as is related below.

The language problem at development corporation meetings was complicated by the very technical and detailed nature of the meetings. The leadership has a radical populist style at meant every detail of every element of the process had to be reviewed.8 For example, the federation/development corporation board took hours to gain a word-by-word understanding of every document, lease, contract, or regulatory agreement that was to be employed in the project. As time went on, newcomers to such meetings had an increasingly difficult time joining the group. English speakers did overcome this hurdle; Spanish speakers did not.

It must have been very difficult for the Spanish speakers who came to such meetings to tell whether their problems in understanding were due to technical and language barriers, personal inability, or deliberate exclusion of Latinos. It would have taken a lot of tenacity and faith in the process to stay long enough to conquer both the technical and language barriers. The lack of trained interpreters hurt. The discussions required a level of technical sophistication with both languages that was not present in the interpreters involved.

Given the difficulty of the barriers that had to be transcended for Latinos to participate, some form of mediation was necessary to assure the Latinos that they were not being deliberately excluded and that they should do their part in fighting their way across the gulf that existed. At this point however, the mediating element was missing. Doubts about personal competency and the intentions of the non-Latinos were unchecked.

 Operating the Coops

As the cooperatives began to take on more physical and operational substance, the failure to move any Latinos to leadership positions became more serious. The rehabilitation and operation of the cooperatives presented complex policy questions that directly affected the residents' lives. There were hard choices to be made and a great many people-hours were needed to make them.

One of the five existing cooperatives and a new construction project of 16 units that were to be converted to a sixth cooperative were in particular crisis. The residents of this housing were almost entirely Latino immigrants, and stable leadership had not developed in either group. The growing belief that the two leaderless groups would fail as coops and the increasing operational burden falling on the non-Latino leadership in the other four groups resulted in increasing pressure on the organizers to solve the Latino leadership problem. Under this pressure one of the organizers, a Chicana, left the project. It was a critical time, and the board was becoming desperate for someone who could do the job.

On the rehabilitation staff, as a bookkeeper, was a professional, trained organizer who, although she was white and had very little facility with Spanish, had worked for a multicultural organization and had, a few years earlier, successfully organized a Latino community in Los Angeles. She was trying to move away from being an organizer, but she could see the need. She was committed to multiculturalism, felt the responsibility to try and solve the problem, and under the urging of staff and board was pressed into service.

She and the remaining Puerto Rican organizer, who had started with the organization as a trainee, responded to the pressure for success in organizing the Latinos with a demand for higher pay and the professionalization of their function. In addition to their organizational and leadership development responsibilities, they had been doing a lot of minor tasks generated by the rehabilitation, such as getting signatures on documents or arranging for temporary relocation during fumigations. The organizers wanted to be freed from this responsibility so they could concentrate on organizing. The board acquiesced to both demands, raising the organizers' salaries and creating a new position to pick up the rehabilitation work.

The board's idea, at this point, was that the English-speaking organizer would work with the four ethnically mixed, functioning cooperatives. The Puerto Rican organizer, with support and training from the new, professional organizer, would concentrate on the two troubled, primarily Latino, Spanish-speaking cooperatives. It soon became obvious that this strategy did not sufficiently address the needs of the two troubled cooperatives, and pressure to solve this problem was again brought on the organizers, particularly the Puerto Rican organizer, whose sole function this was.

The response to the pressure was a demand for more money for the Puerto Rican organizer. This time the federation board lost its temper. Their reaction was to fire the Puerto Rican organizer, who, in the eyes of the board, had not successfully made the switch from rehabilitation gofur to professional organizer. His firing generated a crisis which proved to be another important step in learning what was necessary to solve the problem.

The fired organizer attempted to rally the people with whom he had been working against his firing. Many of the Latinos were afraid of what would happen to them when he was gone. As one person said, "He was our only link to the corporation." Once again the leadership responded with the calling of a mass meeting. Again, the professional interpreter was called in to translate the meeting. The Latino spokespeople at the meeting demanded that the organizer be reinstated pending a full evaluation of Latino participation and the organizer's performance. If this was not possible, they demanded full participation in the selection of his replacement.

It was a very painful meeting, but it was also productive. For the first time, through the shouting at the meeting, the English-speaking leadership felt they had participated in a direct conversation with the Latino residents. They saw, again, what a difference having the professional interpreter meant to the process. They did not want the organizer to be the Latino's only link to the corporation. They wanted to talk directly to the residents, and they became aware and concerned that the organizers had been playing a gatekeeper role.

The board refused to reinstate the fired organizer, but they more than willingly accepted full participation in the hiring of the next person. During the hiring process, conversations between the Americanos and Latinos began to take place. It was learned that one of the problems with the past organizing was that the organizers were not good translators. Some of the Latinos were sufficiently bilingual to know that what was said in Spanish was different from what was being said in English. This made them suspicious of the organizers and the overall cooperative process.

The board learned that when the Latinos had called for independent translators, they were not attacking the board but the organizers. What the Latinos really wanted were competent translators. The Latinos said that every time they came to a meeting, they were told a different story. The English-speakers felt that this was not the case in English and saw why they had to improve the quality of translation if the project was to succeed. A basic rule of organizing is that the organizers must be consistent. However consistent the organizers were in English, it was now learned that they had not been consistent in Spanish.

As a result both of what they learned and their increased desire to talk directly to the Latinos, the board, for the first time, set aside some of the organizing budget for interpreters. A policy was adopted that required that interpreters were to be present at all "significant" meetings.

A primarily Spanish-speaking Salvadoran, who had recently moved into the cooperatives and who had a background of labor organizing in his country, was recommended by the interviewing committee and hired by the board. The two organizers' work was no longer divided along language lines. The new plan was for the two organizers to work as a team. Working this way, they began to make headway.

They began to exploit the organizational potential of small and large crises that took place in the cooperatives by holding building meetings and teaching the people about how to take charge of their situation. In once dramatic case, a group of residents, growing impatient with their coop board's failure to respond to their request for parking facilities, took a little too much charge of their situation and moved the fences separating two of their coop's properties, reducing their neighbor's large yard and making space to park their cars. The idea was a good one, but the process was clearly poor.

The leader of the invasion was a white, English-speaking coop board member (A Latino and Asian were also part of the raiding party). The invaded were all Latinos. Some people began to characterize the situation as representative of the ethnic split in the cooperative. The coop board's immediate response was to remove the invasion leader from the board. In a form of poetic justice and to make their position clear, they replaced him with the newly discovered and articulate Latina spokesperson for the invaded.

The organizers realized the development potential of the incident by setting up a committee, made up of representatives of the 24 properties in the coop, to analyze the distribution of space, recommend a solution for the immediate crisis, and head off

future problems. The cooperative was two-thirds Latino, and their was heavy Latino participation on this committee.

Latino participation was increasing in all the cooperatives and organic Latino leadership was being identified in the four functioning cooperatives, but the leadership problem in the two troubled coops was not materially improving. Leadership was identified, but it was not stable enough to do the job. The organizers put together boards that held together for quite a while but, in both coops, family problems overwhelmed the elected presidents, and they dropped off the boards.

The problem was greater than mere instability in the 16-unit new construction project that was to be the sixth cooperative. The new construction project was a rental project, to be converted to a cooperative, and had a federally required deadline for purchase of shares and formal conversion that none of the other cooperatives had. The deadline for sale of the shares came and passed without the required sale.

The residents of this project suffered from the years of failed organizing and Latino isolation. The firing of the Puerto Rican organizer had split the group in two, between those who had come to trust the process and those, still suspicious, who had not. There was not enough time for the new effort to heal the wounds of the past and, at the time the sale was required, each faction approached the development corporation board with the desire to buy out the other. This was not possible, and the project was destined to remain a rental project throughout its life.

The failure of the new construction project to convert drove the organizers even harder to find a solution to the remaining leaderless cooperative's problem. The organizers came to the conclusion that internal leadership development was not possible under the urgent operational pressures facing this cooperative. They believed that the education level of the particular immigrants in this cooperative was too low, and their economic marginality too great, for them to carry out the tasks needed to operate the cooperative without years of preparation and training. Their solution was to look outside the cooperatives for potential leadership.

There were about 50 vacancies in the five cooperatives after the rehabilitation was completed, including half a dozen in the troubled coop. The organizers began to encourage active Latino people they knew to get on the waiting list. A number of these people did sign up. Next, the organizer focused on membership selection, particularly in the troubled coop.

Their efforts and the choices made by the cooperative boards brought in a significant number of people with the leadership skills and the educational background to understand how to operate the cooperatives. Several of these people were organizers themselves. Quite a few were bilingual. Although the goal of the organizers had been to find caretaker leadership, they had, in fact, recruited people into the ranks of the residents who for the first time could act as multicultural mediators.

The recruitment of these multicultural mediators provided the last major element missing in the process of achieving multiculturalism and full Latino participation in the leadership of the cooperatives and the federation. They proved to be the vehicle for conquering the motivational barrier, described by Taylor and Simards (1975) that had remained despite the efforts of organizers and the presence of interpreters.

The Latino activists who moved into the cooperatives stimulated participation among the existing residents. Together, the new activists and the old residents, some scared by the failure of the new construction project to convert to a cooperative and others still having some doubts about the firing of the organizer, formed a Latino caucus to make sure Latino interests were looked after.

Initially this group focused on analyzing the corporation to locate its center of power. The federated structure, however, did not have a central focus, and the analysis led them back to their cooperative boards. Following a monocultural pluralist strategy, the group then moved to place Latinos on the boards. There was no resistance to this move, which the Americanos had wanted for a long time; but fear of such resistance did result in at least one overt power play in which the Latinos stacked an election meeting to put one of their members on a coop board.

With this new-found, Latino leadership came the responsibility of operating the cooperatives. This pressure soon transformed the Latino caucus primarily from a political into an educative body. More and more the focus of the group was on how to get the job done. The initial monocultural advocacy was moderated by a concern for who worked and who didn't, regardless of their ethnicity.

The organizers accelerated the process of fully integrating the Latinos by going beyond the original directive of the federation board. They staffed every meeting they

could with interpreters. It took them a while, however, to learn how to do this. Before the new leadership moved in, a lot of residents in the project claimed to be bilingual. There was a several month period of experimenting with resident volunteer interpreters. Then there was experimentation with paying residents to do the translation. Virtually none of the residents proved to be bilingual enough for the material. For example, an attempt at translating a newsletter containing information on the cooperatives went through four translators before it was done adequately.

The move was increasingly toward paid outside interpreters. Even this proved troublesome because various interpreters translated the technical coop and real estate words differently, creating confusion. Finally, a single individual who proved up to the task was hired regularly at a $10.00/hour rate to come as many evenings as he could to do the translating, with other paid translators and volunteers filling in where necessary. With the addition of the new bilingual leadership, this seemed to work.

The new bilingual activists could monitor the quality of the translation and ensure uniformity, a factor that had been missing. They did not want to do the translation; they wanted to participate in the meetings, and could not do both. However, they often interrupted the translation with discussions of how to translate various concepts. Sometimes the translator would shout out for help, and one of the new bilingual people would make a suggestion. Differences among Latino national groups also emerged. When important documents were to be translated, a professional was hired to do the work and a committee of people from different nations was set up to argue out the correctness of the particular Spanish usage.

Besides assuring uniformity and correctness in translation, the new activists made the discussions accessible to different cultural groups, in particular the less-educated and rural Latino immigrants. They were able to illustrate and explain technical concepts by reference to agrarian metaphors and stories from local oral traditions. They could find the cultural equivalents for jokes, puns, and role references. They could detect the intention behind a clumsy phrase, a potential insult, or an inappropriate gesture, and ensure understanding on all sides.

 Conclusions

    In sum, the bilingual activists performed the whole spectrum of functions that the theoretical literature assigns to the cultural mediator, and in so doing provided an ongoing, and still evolving, resolution to the problem of Latino participation in the cooperative. In addition to easing communication problems, they undertook leadership roles properly reserved to group and cultural members. In the short term, they provided the skills, commitment and stability needed for immediate organizational survival; over the medium term they were able to motivate participation, and make it effective; over the long term they are both role models and hands-on trainers for leadership development among the established residents.

    The Route 2 history is one of adaptation and change, and the process of organizational development continues even as we write. Every social solution creates its own set of new problems, and we can be confident that the introduction of cultural mediators is the beginning of a new story, as well as the end of the story we have told here.

    Our recounting of Route 2's struggle and adaptation has been intended to illustrate the three roles identified as essential to bilingual, multicultural organizing. Just as important as the definition of the roles themselves is their allocation--the organizer and interpreter roles to separate professionals, the mediator role to appropriately skilled and bicultural group members. Finally, we wish to emphasize the process, a social-learning experience of confronting theory with reality, in which successive conceptions of these roles emerged, were tested and reformulated, and were ultimately validated in practice.

 1.George Simmel argues that mediating activity is constant and universal, not
 only in formal organizations, but in "all groups of more than two elements.
 . . .From the conversation among three persons that lasts only an hour to the
 permanent family of three, there is no triad in which a dissent between any
 two elements does not occur . . . and in which the third member does not play
 a mediating role" (1950:148-149).

2.The achievement of functional cultural relativism and multicultural member-

ship also distinguishes the mediating from the marginal person, who loses
membership in one culture without gaining it in another: the mediator links
cultures, where the marginal person falls between them; where the marginal
person suffers incompatibility, the mediator finds a reconciliation (cf. P.S.
Adler 1974; Bochner 1981; Lum 1977).

3. Allan David Heskin began working with the community organization analyzed in
the case in 1979 as a volunteer on the board of directors of R2CHC. He was
the only outsider accepted on this board. He has been participating in and
studying the group since that time. Robert Heffner became involved in the
research in 1984, first doing literature review and then as co-analyst and
author of this article.

4. In the community studied, the term Latino is used in opposition to the term
Americano. Latino means immigrants from Latin countries. Chicanos (U.S. born
persons of Latin descent) were generally classified as Americanos,
particularly if they do not have the ability to speak Spanish. Very heated
interchanges sometimes occurred between Latinos and Chicanos at meetings.
Chicanos on a number of occasions expressed distress about the time it took
to translate at meetings and were attacked by Latinos for these "racist"
comments. When questioned (in private) about these interchanges, Latinos
would say it takes more than Latin heritage to be a Latino.

5. The reason the party was entirely outside was that the hosts were refinishing
their floors. It is not clear why the Latinos did not know this or found the
reason inadequate.

6. The group had the good fortune to be in the State Assembly and Senate
district of two of the more influential legislatures in the State. They won
the support of these two legislators, who carried the needed legislation for
the group.

7. No professional Latino organizer applied for a job during this period. It is
difficult to know why. However, it might be speculated that many experienced
Latino organizers are nationalist and would rather work in all Latino
situations than in multicultural situations. Also, the early activism of
Cubans in the group gave it a Cuban reputation which seemed to keep at a
distance Chicano activists who did not share what they saw as conservative
Cuban ideology.

8. This leadership group would have to be characterized as "radical populist" in
approach. They, for example, resisted State efforts to put outside "experts"
on the board of thei corporation, and kept an iron grip on hired staff,
reserving almost all power to the board including the hiring and firing of
even part-time employees, and the issuing of all checks regardless of how
small the amount.

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