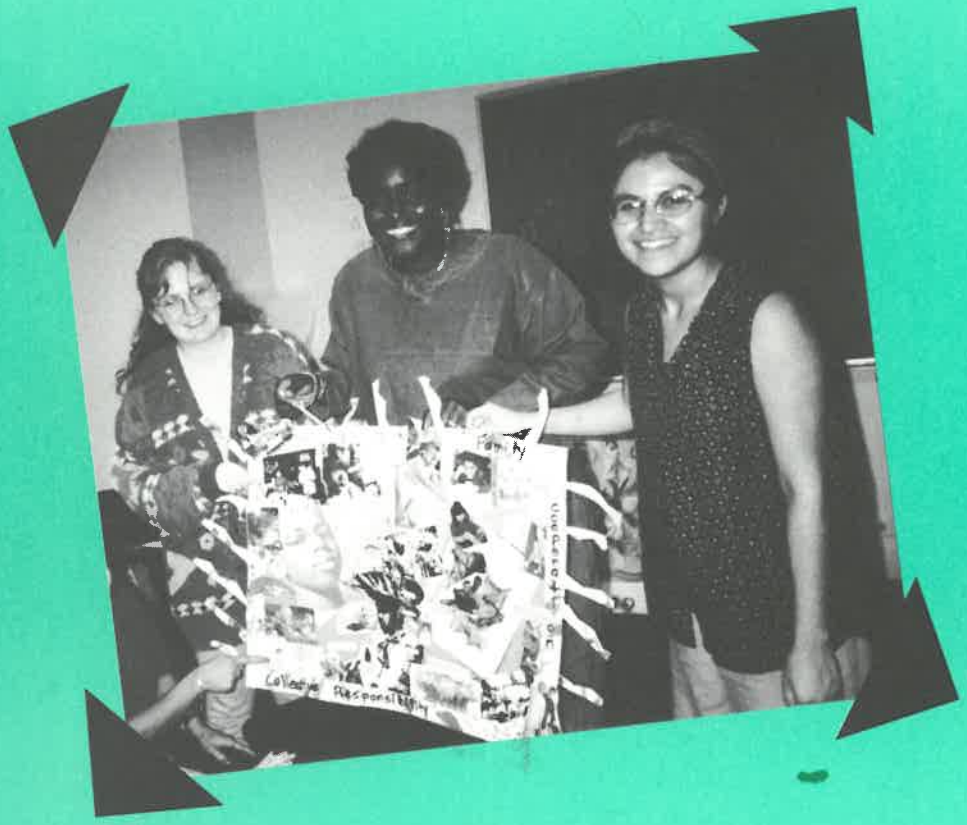
COYUNTURAL ANALYSIS

Critical Thinking for Meaningful Action





A Manual for Facilitators

Written and produced by the Chicago Office of the American Friends Service Committee

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59 E. Van Buren #1400
Chicago, IL 60605

The AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE has a nearly 80-year history of service based on the Quaker beliefs in the dignity of the individual, peaceful resolution to conflict, and the rights of individuals and communities to determine their own futures. The Chicago Center is committed to developing leadership from within the diverse communities of Chicago, and to building a sustainable social justice movement.

For more information or to get involved, contact Chicago AFSC,
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The Praxis Project

A program of the American Friends Service Committee

1997

Table of Contents

Introduction 3

How this book is organized 4

Key 5

Who We Are 6

Some History 7

Structure or Conjuncture? 8

Concepts

Identity 10

The Moment 12

Analysis 14

Contradictions 16

Umbrella Contradictions 18

History 20

Vision 22

Review 24

Process

The Matrix 26

Identifying Contradictions 28

Principal Contradictions 30

Codes 32

Actors 34

The Relation of Forces 36

Opportunities for Change 38

Review 40

A Word About Strategic Planning 41

Conclusion 42

Bibliography 43

Glossary 44

Task Sheets 46

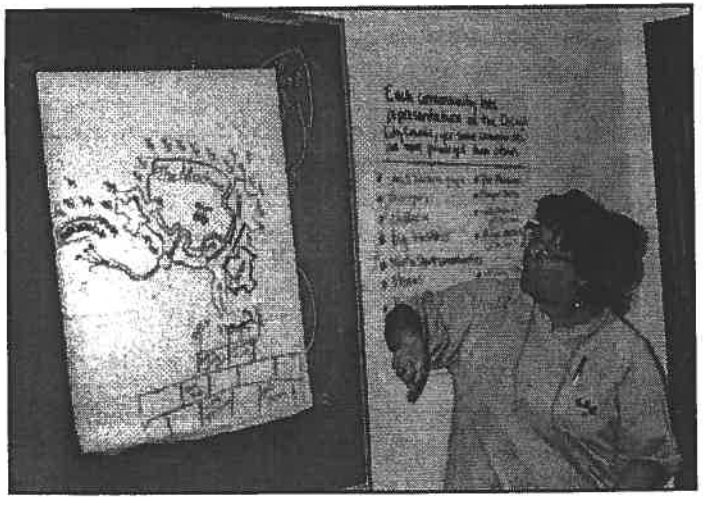
Introduction

Who Should Use this Book?

Community activists, community organizers, progressive teachers and students, anyone who would like to discover some concepts that will help them assess the situation in their community right now and use this analysis to work for social transformation.

Coya What?

"Coya...what?" is what people often say to us when we tell them that we teach community groups to use coyuntural analysis. Though the word may be awkward, it has a powerful meaning. Coyuntural comes from the Spanish word *coyuntura*, which means the intersection of various social forces and their effect upon a particular moment in history. Think about it — think about your community at this moment. What if you had a tool that would help you analyze the situation in your community and find opportunities to create change? Though the terminology may seem awkward at first, the process can really come in handy!



Why Analyze?

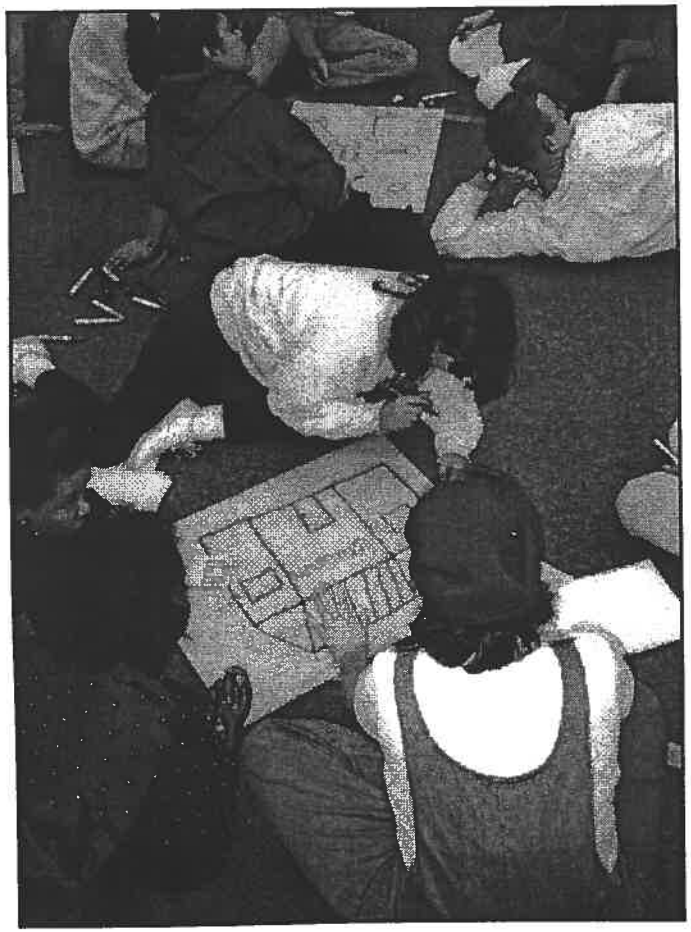
Convincing people to take time to do analysis can be a hard sell these days. Community activists and organizers are working hard to solve problems in their communities but they are also working one or two jobs to make ends meet and taking care of their families. This situation makes people anxious about spending a lot of time simply thinking and analyzing their community, and we understand that.

However, we base our work on the premise that action needs reflection to be truly successful. We know that the situation, the "moment" is always changing in the world and in our communities. For this reason, we know that reflection enhances action, and vice versa. We try to work toward a dynamic relationship between action and reflection called *praxis*. In this way, using coyuntural analysis can lead to an action in your community, which should lead to some reflection on that action, and then a new coyuntural analysis of your community and a new action and so on.

How this book is organized

Note:

It is essential that you use this book as a framework — not a recipe. When we first started to try to understand the process of coyuntural analysis, we had many wonderful resources from which to work (see bibliography), but we knew that we would have to learn from others' experiences and then create a new process that made sense for the people that we work with here in Chicago. We hope you will do the same for your particular reality.



The Beginning...

This book is broken down into several sections. The beginning section will help you get acquainted with the background of both coyuntural analysis and our work at the Praxis Project.

...The Middle...

The next two sections, **Concepts** and **Process**, actually contain the exercises that we use when teaching coyuntural analysis.

- **Concepts** contains ideas that we feel are important for a group to understand to engage in coyuntural analysis. This section contains corresponding exercises for every concept.
- **Process** contains exercises that form the heart of the analysis. Each exercise is tied to concepts explained in the previous section and also brings up some new ideas. These are all explained before the exercise is introduced.

When we work with groups for the first time we use all of the exercises in both sections. Typically this takes about 20 hours that we break up into different sessions dependent on the needs of the group. Later, groups can repeat the analysis process on their own by repeating part or all of the Process section.

...and the End.

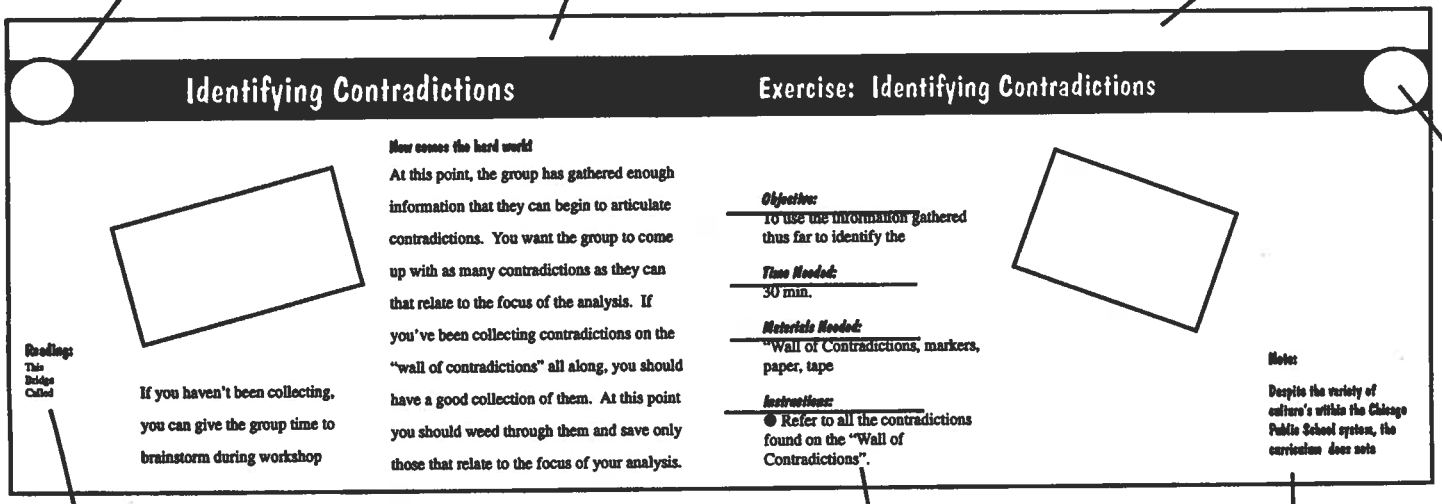
This section contains some follow-up information that may be useful for you, including a glossary and bibliography.

Key

Icons:
cartoons inside the circles or squares correspond to the ideas being discussed

Left hand pages:
contain background information, explanations and examples of concepts or parts of the process

Right hand pages:
contain the corresponding exercises



Section indicator:
■ a square in the corner indicates the Concepts section
● a circle in the corner indicates the Process section

Reading:
suggestions for additional reading — all references contained in bibliography

Body of the exercise:
contains all the information you need to do this exercise

Notes:
contain interesting sidebars or examples

Who We Are



The Whole Picture

Most of the people who have worked on this process and this book for the last two years are staff members of the Chicago Center of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).

AFSC is a Quaker-based social justice organization that was founded by conscientious objectors to WWI in 1917. AFSC has offices all over the world including many local offices across the United States.

The Chicago Center is a local office of AFSC. We have community-based projects that work with the Latino, African-American and Arab communities in Chicago. One of our projects, called the Praxis Project, is a nontraditional learning project created to nurture leaders from within Chicago's diverse communities.

Coyuntural analysis is an important part of the work we do in the Praxis Project, but it is only one piece. We try to integrate five elements of leadership into all of our work, whether it's a coyuntural analysis workshop with teachers, a media literacy workshop with Arab youth or an economic literacy workshop with women activists.

Five Elements of Leadership

Critical Thinking: deepening our understanding of the world by looking carefully and analytically at events, trends, and structures that affect our lives.

Collective Vision: linking our personal visions of social change with others' in order to create a collective vision of the community transformed.

Democratic Processes: engaging in respectful collaboration with other activists and working in democratic teams, in order to demonstrate commitment to building community at every opportunity.

Spirit: finding sources of strength and guidance within that keep us in the struggle over the long haul, regardless of our spiritual backgrounds.

Strategic Planning: recognizing opportunities for action and mapping out the goals, objectives and tactics for effective action.

We consider coyuntural analysis to be a tool for critical thinking that leads to strategic planning. We have tried to integrate collective vision building and shared moments of reflection (spirit) in a participatory, democratic process.

Some history...

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)

Coyuntural analysis has its roots in the work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who was born on the island of Sardinia in 1891. Gramsci overcame many early obstacles such as poverty, a 90% illiteracy rate in the community where he grew up, the imprisonment of his father, and poor health to become an important Marxist theoretician in the midst of Italian fascism in the 1920's.

Mussolini imprisoned Gramsci in 1926 because of his attempts to organize workers for revolution. During his time in prison Gramsci tried to understand why Italian peasants supported Mussolini, when this appeared to go against their class interests. He wrote prodigiously during this period and developed several important concepts including *hegemony* and *praxis*, as well as ideas that are central to coyuntural analysis: the complexity of the conjuncture or "moment," the importance of historical context, the use of contradictions and the relationship of forces. Gramsci died in prison, but his wife was able to smuggle out his notebooks which have been published under the title of *The Prison Notebooks*.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997)

Paulo Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, Brazil. Recife was one of the poorest and most underdeveloped areas in the world. As an adult, Freire turned his attention to the problems of illiteracy and education. The methodology he developed working with people in the northeast of Brazil was adopted by Catholic organizations and others working in the area. Freire's methodology was not just about teaching people how to read — it centered on "culture circles" that worked with peasants in a dialogic way on reading, writing and critical consciousness or *conscientização*. Freire was considered a threat to the military dictatorship that overthrew civilian rule in 1964 and so he was jailed.

Eventually he was forced into exile with his wife and their five children. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was Freire's first book to be published in English, and many books have followed. Freire's writings and theories have been the seeds of a movement called popular education. Community educators, classroom teachers, trade-union educators and many others have been inspired by Freire's concepts. We have tried to design our coyuntural analysis process to reflect Freire's notion of education that is not neutral and that works by posing questions and engaging in dialogue to transform communities through reflection and action.

Work in Latin America and Canada

Popular and grassroots movements in Latin America have been strongly influenced by both Gramsci and Freire over the last 30 years. The process of *análisis de coyuntura* was largely developed by groups in Latin America working against military dictatorships and the U.S. control over many segments of their society. Meanwhile, Freire's influence was felt by the spread of *popular education* in these same grassroots groups.

In the 1980's Canadian groups working in solidarity with Central American groups started to exchange ideas about popular education and social transformation. One group in particular, the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice developed a variation of coyuntural analysis called *Naming the Moment*. The Jesuit Centre eventually formed a group called the Moment Project which formed around anti-NAFTA work, holding monthly coyuntural analysis sessions in which hundreds of activists participated.

Readings:

- ***Naming the Moment***
  by Deborah Barndt
- ***Pedagogy of the Oppressed***
  by Paulo Freire
- ***Selections from the Prison Notebooks***
  by Antonio Gramsci

(see bibliography)

Structure or Conjuncture?

Reading:

"Analysis of situations. Relations of force." pp. 175-185 from *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* by Antonio Gramsci (see bibliography)

Note:

Decide with your group how to focus your analysis. You can focus on a geographical region, such as a neighborhood, a city, or a whole country. Or, you can focus on a topic, such as violence or education.

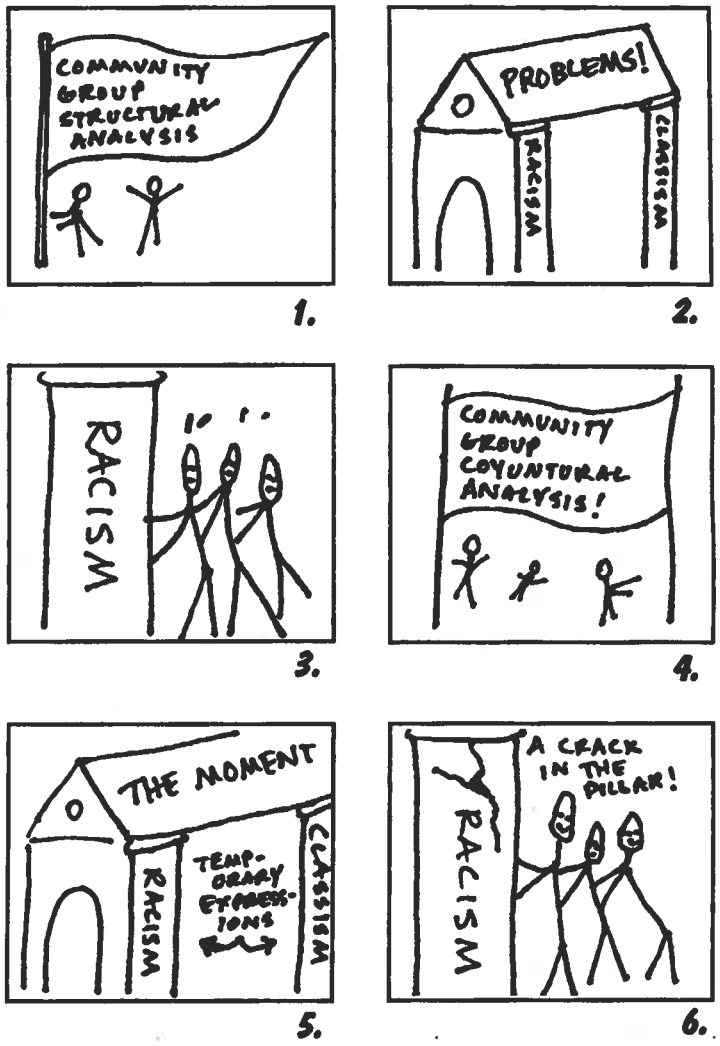
Static or Temporary?

You may or may not be familiar with the term *structural analysis*, but you probably analyze social structures all the time. Structural analysis looks at elements of the social structure that are relatively static or permanent —for instance, the oppression of people of color by whites with power and influence. However, sometimes social relations are expressed in a temporary or short term way. For instance while you might have expected wealthy whites to support the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in California, would you have expected naturalized citizens or African-Americans to support it? In some cases, they did.

The moment is always complex. Assuming that *all* people of color would oppose legislation that will hurt *some* people of color does not acknowledge the multitude of factors that affect people's decisions. We do not exist within a vacuum — our positions, opinions and actions, are influenced by economic, cultural, ideological and political forces. In coyuntural analysis, we look at the intersection of forces that exist at a particular moment (the *conjuncture*), and how it affects individuals and communities.

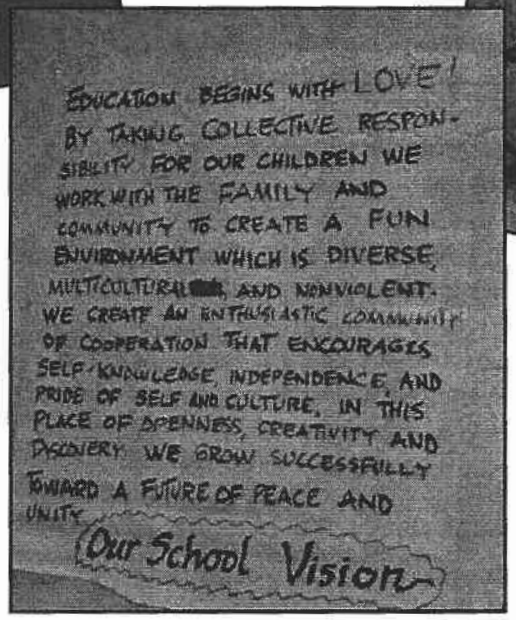
Structural and conjunctural ways of looking at society are not mutually exclusive. The structural, more permanent aspects are always there — it's just that we are looking at the short term expressions when we engage in the conjunctural or coyuntural analysis.

This is why coyuntural analysis tends to lead to action. When we look at those aspects of our society that are seemingly static or structural (such as sexism or classism), we can become depressed or feel overwhelmed and unable to act. When we look at the conjunctural or the "moment," we find temporary aspects of these structures that, because of their immediacy and their scaled-down nature, often lend themselves to short-term action.



Concepts




EDUCATION BEGINS WITH LOVE!
BY TAKING COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR CHILDREN WE WORK WITH THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY TO CREATE A FUN ENVIRONMENT WHICH IS DIVERSE, MULTICULTURAL, AND NONVIOLENT. WE CREATE AN ENTHUSIASTIC COMMUNITY OF COOPERATION THAT ENCOURAGES SELF-KNOWLEDGE, INDEPENDENCE, AND PRIDE OF SELF AND CULTURE. IN THIS PLACE OF OPENNESS, CREATIVITY AND DISCOVERY WE GROW SUCCESSFULLY TOWARD A FUTURE OF PEACE AND UNITY.
Our School Vision



Identity

Who is in the room?

"When my parents came to this country from Croatia, they didn't speak any English — and yet they were able to make it here. I saw them work hard and they didn't take handouts from anyone. Why can't other people work hard like my parents and live without welfare?"

"Some people in my community truly need welfare to survive. How can women go out to work when they can't afford childcare? I've seen the many of the jobs in my neighborhood leave over the last several years — where are these people supposed to work?"

As you can see these are two different points of view about the same subject — welfare. The speakers' perspectives are informed by their own life experiences, and those of their family and friends. The way that they look at reality is influenced by who they are.

Similarly, the analysis that you are about to engage in will also be influenced by who makes up your group. If your group is trying to analyze disability rights in the United States and yet no one in your group is disabled, obviously, you'll be missing a crucial perspective. This doesn't mean you should find "token" representatives from different groups. One Asian woman cannot be expected to speak for all Asian women. Is she a new immigrant or someone whose family has lived here for generations and she considers herself "American"? Is her heritage Chinese, Japanese, Korean or something else? These and many other factors make her the unique individual she is — with her own unique perspective.



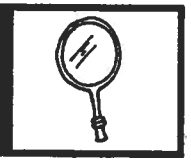
Who isn't in the room?

If you are an organizer, you have no doubt thought about these issues. The best advice we can give is that because this process should be used as a way for community or activist groups to look at the reality of each moment and find openings for action, try to include everyone you can who is directly involved in the situation or geographic region that you are analyzing.

When you can't include everyone — at least figure out who is missing and acknowledge that your analysis will be affected by their absence. When a group of activists analyzed Chicago, they didn't have the 3 million people living in Chicago involved — but they did have a good sampling of the many ethnic and cultural groups in Chicago, although no people with disabilities and no youth. This was recognized at the start of the analysis and the group tried to inject the viewpoints of youth and people with disabilities to the best of their ability.

Finding out who is and isn't in the room is a good way to start any workshop.

Exercise: Who is in the Room?



Objective:

to provide the group with an opportunity to learn some things about one another and identify the different perspectives present in the group; to give each person a chance to think about the subjectivity of his or her own position

Time Needed:

30 min.

Materials Needed:

tape for line on floor

Instructions:

- Make a tape line on the floor. Ask participants to stand on one side of the room. You will be calling out the various categories to the right (or you can make up your own).
- Tell the group that as each category is called out, they should consider whether or not they belong in that category and whether or not they feel comfortable sharing that information with the group. Those who do should cross over the line. After the group can see who is represented in that category, those who crossed the line should go back to the rest of the group and wait for the next category to be called.
- After this activity, have a discussion with the group about whose perspectives are missing that would be important for the particular subject you are analyzing.

° born before 1950
° born in Chicago
° born outside U.S.
° both parents living
° come from a single parent home
° have someone in your family who has been divorced
° have been discriminated against because of the color of your skin
° have been discriminated against because of your sexuality
° grew up poor
° grew up in a religious family
° have experienced the effects of alcoholism or substance abuse in your family
° have personally felt racist feelings
° have dependents
° would like more children
° have experienced mental illness in your family
° have dealt with someone close to you having AIDS
° have worked on a project with other people and have felt a real success in your efforts
° have been discriminated against because of a disability
° grew up with more than enough
° grew up in a rural area
° grew up in the suburbs
° grew up in an urban area
° have someone in your family who has received welfare
° first generation of your family born in the U.S.
° went to college



The Moment

Think of Your Life as a Timeline

As you look back over your experiences you can probably identify one or two moments in your life when forces and circumstances converged to create change in your life. Maybe these circumstances changed the way that you thought about the world — a political awakening — like the ex-nun who told of changing her life's work after being part of the protests in the 1968 Democratic Convention. Or sometimes events like a job loss, a move across the country, or coming out to your parents will create a turning point in your life and your consciousness. These moments are full of power and energy. If we look at history, we can see that this same principle of "the moment" is applicable. The forces and circumstances that converge at a moment can also be thought of as a conjuncture or *coyuntura*. For example, all over the world, 1968 was a significant historical moment for many reasons. In retrospect we can look at the *coyuntura*, identify the forces at play and by analyzing their relationships, recognize openings for change that were available at that moment.

Reality Check

The real trick, and the point of coyuntural analysis, is to identify the moment that we are in right now, and analyze its elements. Finding the current moment can be thought of as identifying the reality that exists for your community right now. Remember, your personal identity and the collective identity of the group you are working with will influence this reading of reality. Remember also that the moment is always changing — you'll have to continue to engage in coyuntural analysis as the realities shift.

Note:

We usually mention to participants that we recognize the difficulty of isolating one moment in your life, but that this act of pulling your life apart is analysis, and that is what we're here to learn. If you tell the rest of the group your life story as series of moments that culminate to the present, you are engaging in synthesis.

We often introduce the concept of the moment by having participants reflect upon their own lives and share stories of a significant moment.

Inez

Inez told a story about her early experiences with education:

"I didn't know English when I first came to this country. I had a hard time in school and teachers were often condescending to me. Finally, one teacher asked me what I wanted to do when I finished school. I said that I wanted to go to college and the teacher laughed and said that he didn't think I was college material. It made me so mad — from that point on I became completely determined to go to college and to become a teacher so that I could help bilingual students."

Haneen

Haneen, a young Palestinian woman who was raised in the U.S., told her story:

"Although I am Palestinian, I never felt that it was part of my identity. I always felt that I was American. When I was 15 my father and I went to the Middle East. When we were trying to cross back over the Israeli border from Jordan, they would not let us enter because we were Palestinian. They took away some of our possessions. It was a very upsetting experience. But, because of that experience — for the first time in my life I felt connected to my Palestinian identity. I was able to take the negative experience of that moment and ultimately make it empowering."

Exercise: Naming Your Moment

MAY 4

Objective:

to give participants an opportunity to get to know one another in a different way and to begin to understand the significance of the moment by using their own lives as a framework

Time needed:

roughly 1 1/2 hours for 15 people

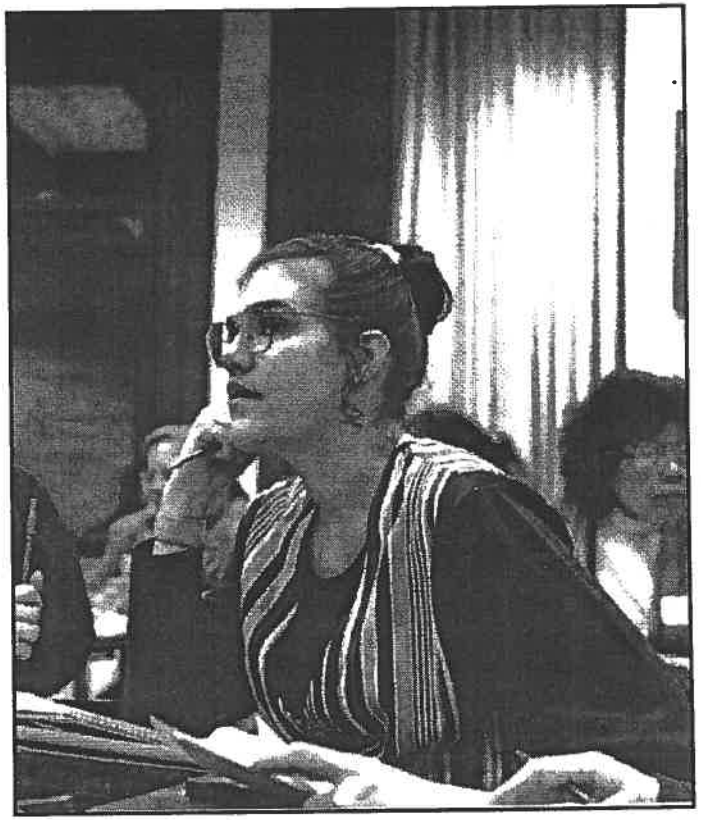
Materials needed:

newsprint, markers

Instructions:

- Ask participants to look back into their personal history and think of one defining (politically or otherwise) moment in their lives. It's a good idea to let people know ahead of time that they will be asked this question. We usually send the question to people with a group of readings and an agenda a few weeks before the workshop, so they have time to think about it.
- Ask the group to consider the circumstances and events surrounding their moment, allowing them to be transformed.
- Each person should relate this information in 5-7 minutes.

Write down key points on newsprint for future reference.

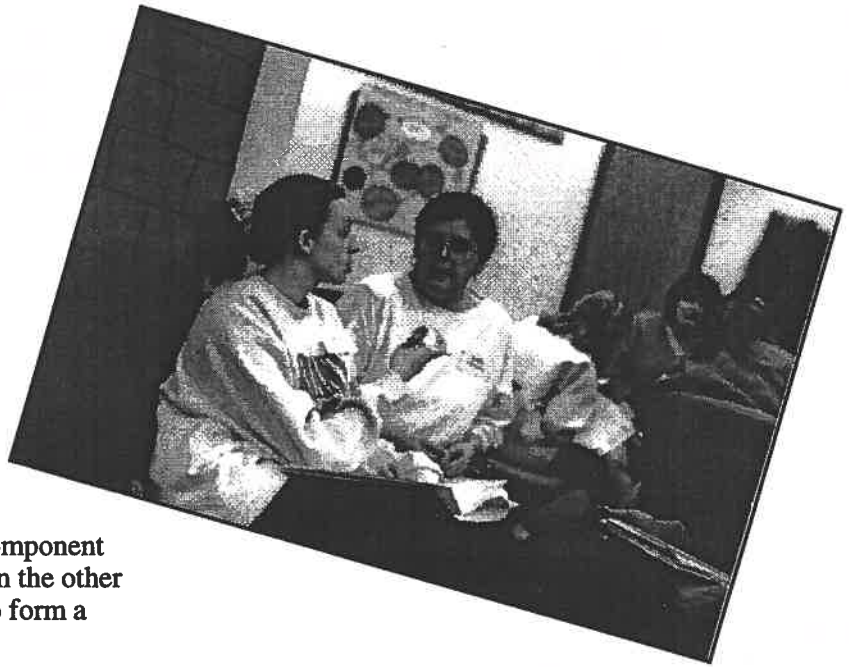


Note:

We've found that it isn't so important to try to tie together everyone's stories at the end. Instead, as you are listening you can jot down points that illustrate concepts involved in the analysis.

"In Haneen's story it was at the moment that she was being held at the border that she realized a contradiction in her life, she did not consider herself to be Palestinian and yet others did and were willing to take her freedom away because of it. Haneen was able to recognize that contradiction and use it in a powerful way by reclaiming her Palestinian identity."

Analysis



What is analysis?

Analysis is breaking up a whole into its component parts to discover their nature. Synthesis, on the other hand, is combining the parts or elements to form a whole.

Reading:
"Theory as Liberatory Practice"
pp. 59-75 in
Teaching to Transgress (Education as the Practice of Freedom)
by bell hooks
(see bibliography)

"I don't have time to sit and do all of this analytical work — people in my community need action!" This is a common response heard when we ask people to spend 20 hours learning the concept and process of coyuntural analysis. It is a big commitment for anyone, let alone for most of the people who come to our workshops. All of them have jobs and families, on top of working for their communities. We agree that theory without practice is of little use to activists. But we would also argue that practice without theory isn't as effective and powerful as it could be. Coyuntural analysis is a process that intertwines both theory and practice — it is a reflective process that leads to action, then further reflection and more action, and on and on as the historical moment continues to change. We feel that analysis in general and coyuntural analysis in particular will enhance the work of any community organization.

The theory/practice split

In Latin America and other parts of the world, theory and practice have an easy alliance and coyuntural analysis is a way of life for many. However, in the U.S. we find that people often sit in one camp or the other. For this reason we often spend a little time analyzing analysis! This next exercise is designed to bring participants to the realization that they actually do analysis all the time, they just might not realize it — and that a richer analysis can be obtained with the proper tools.

Exercise: Apples and Oranges



Objective:

to introduce the elements of analysis

Time needed:

30-45 min.

Materials Needed:

a rotting apple, an orange, newsprint, markers, measuring tape, a scale, pH paper, knife



Instructions:

- Ask the group to break into two smaller groups. One group gets the apple and the other the orange. Each group must describe their piece of fruit. The group can list their description on large paper. (5 min.)

- Each small group presents their description to the large group. Then ask the large group to brainstorm what tools they used to generate the descriptions (observation, comparison, etc.) and put these up on paper.

- Then ask each group if they know what the pH content of the apple is or how much the orange weighs. Ask them what they would need to find this information. Then distribute the tools listed in the materials section and let them generate more detailed information.

- Have the small groups report back to the large group. Ask the large group to think about what tools they would have to use to come up with additional information.

- Have a discussion with the large group about analysis. What tools from the first step do they use in their work (observation, comparison, etc.)? What tools do they use to generate more detailed information in their work? Coyuntural analysis can be looked upon as another tool for activists to use.

Note:

If we remember, we bring a rotting apple to use for this exercise to once again introduce the element of time and the moment. Seeing the apple in a decaying state reminds everyone that the moment is changing all the time.

Contradictions

"Like saying one thing and doing another..."

Our lives are surrounded by and often made up of contradictions. They are an essential part of the social fabric. If left alone these contradictions are often the site of discord. However, when contradictions are isolated and analyzed they can provide fertile ground for social change. An essential part of coyuntural analysis is finding, investigating, and exploiting the contradictions that exist within a *coyuntura*.

Contradictions are only one element within coyuntural analysis; however we tend to spend a lot of time on them because in our experience it seems to be the hardest concept for North American groups to grasp. We have had some very interesting philosophical discussions in our workshops about how different cultures view contradictions. The people in our groups who are from Latin America usually already know the concept of contradiction because it has been part of their formal or informal understanding of analysis. People in our groups who have been raised in the United States usually have some notion of what contradiction means, but don't naturally link it to a social context. Asian participants have reminded us that in Eastern thought, contradictions are not always something that need to be "solved."

Most people probably have a working definition of "contradiction" in their heads. We found that the meaning of contradiction was often conflated with the meanings of issue and conflict. After the first few times of trying to make it through coyuntural analysis with this muddled understanding of contradiction, we realized we needed to clarify its meaning in order to use it as a tool. Therefore, we spend a lot of time in our workshops trying to understand the concept of contradiction. Look at the examples to the right.

Note:

We have the definitions to the right printed on large posters that can be seen throughout the room, so people can refer back to them during the session. However, we keep the poster with the definition of contradiction covered up until after this first part of the workshop because in this exercise participants and facilitators work together to define contraction within a social arena.

A group of activists in Philadelphia came up with this definition:

"...opposing forces that exist within a whole."



Issue:

a significant social, political, or economic situation

Example: 1: domestic violence

Example 2: falling wages



Conflict:

social, political, or economic forces in opposition

Example 1: women's rights vs. patriarchal culture

Example 2: multinational corporate interests vs. needs of the people



Contradiction:

a situation in which forces in opposition share a common element

Example 1: Women are cautioned to fear strangers on the street, yet they are more likely to be hurt by someone they know in the home.

Example 2: Despite continued growth in the U.S. economy, the average worker's weekly salary has fallen continuously since 1973.

Exercise: Liberty and Justice for All

Objective:

to clarify the meaning of contradiction in this context

Time Needed:

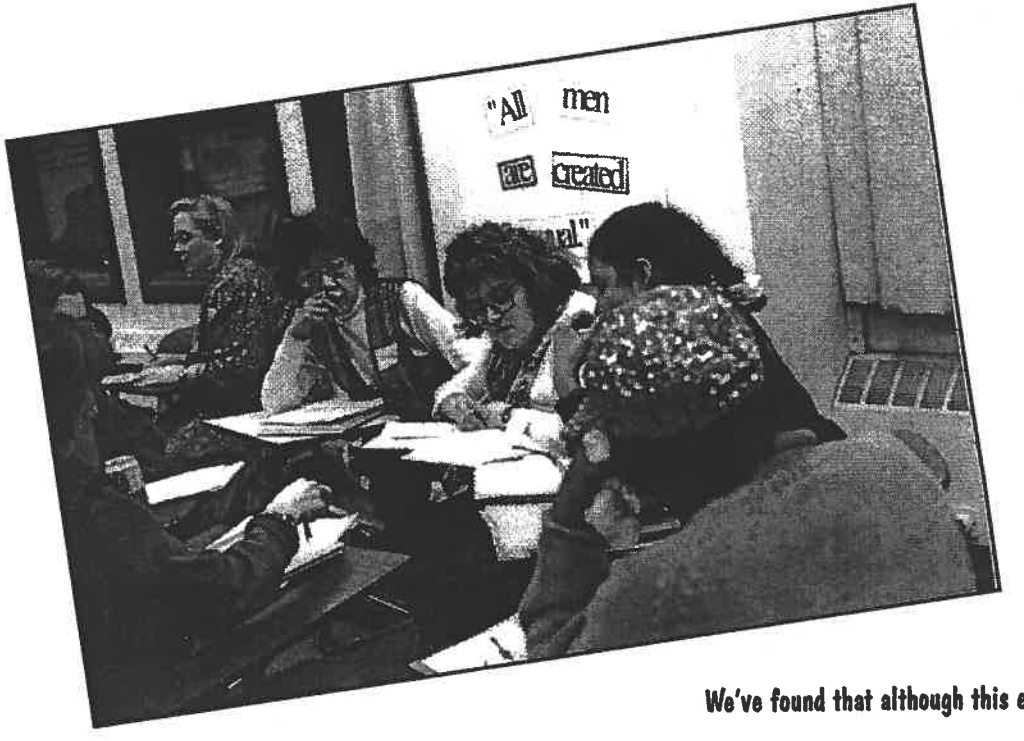
30 min.

Materials Needed:

large paper with statements written (see below), newsprint, markers, large posters with definitions and examples

Instructions:

- Ask the group to come up with their own definition of contradiction, and share with large group.
- Ask the group to come to consensus but realize that we are going to deepen our definition in this context.
- Present statements that are hung on the wall (Liberty and Justice for All, All Men are Created Equal, etc.) It will help if you can find a phrase that has particular relevance to the group, for example: with Chicago Public School Teachers we use the CPS motto "Our Children Our Future".)
- The group will be asked to choose a statement and articulate why that statement presents a contradiction within the context of social reality.
- Present the examples for issue, conflict, and contradiction. Discuss.
- Together, come to a consensus on a definition of contradiction.



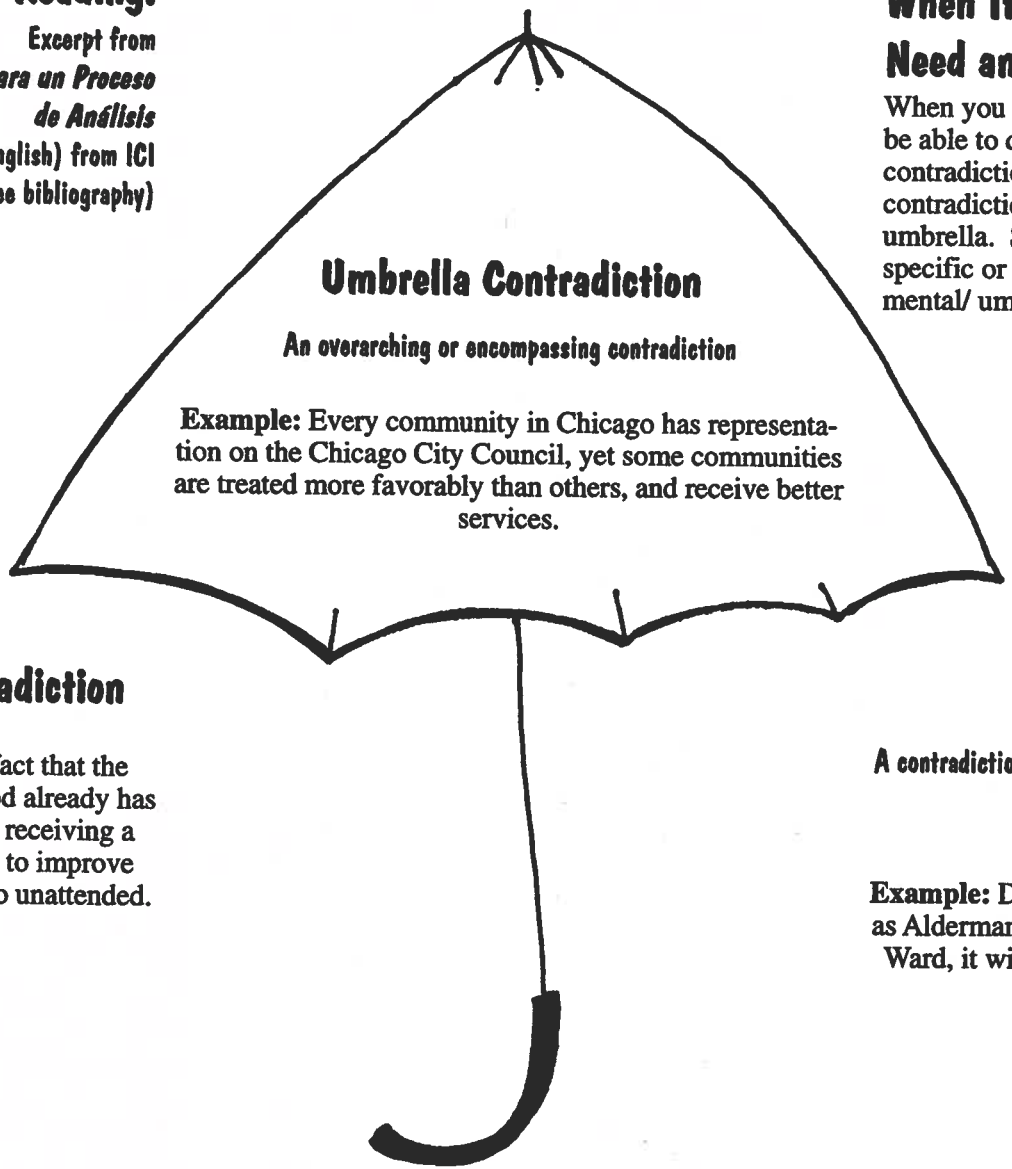
Note:

We've found that although this exercise might seem too elementary at times, the groups that develop their own definitions of contradiction always have a clearer concept of the term.

Umbrella Contradictions

Reading:

Excerpt from
Apartes Metodologicos para un Proceso de Análisis
(in English) from ICI
(see bibliography)



Umbrella Contradiction

An overarching or encompassing contradiction

Example: Every community in Chicago has representation on the Chicago City Council, yet some communities are treated more favorably than others, and receive better services.

When It's Raining Contradictions, You Need an Umbrella

When you collect lots and lots of contradictions, it helps to be able to distinguish between fundamental or umbrella contradictions and secondary contradictions. Fundamental contradictions are overarching or encompassing, like an umbrella. Secondary contradictions tend to be more specific or might be examples or evidence of the fundamental/ umbrella contradiction.

Secondary Contradiction

Example: Despite the fact that the Lincoln Park neighborhood already has beautiful parks, they are receiving a large grant from the city to improve their parks while others go unattended.

Secondary Contradiction

A contradiction that might be more specific and fall under an umbrella contradiction

Example: Daniel Solis has been appointed to the 25th Ward as Alderman by the Mayor, yet since he does not live in this Ward, it will be hard for him to represent this community.

Exercise: Phrasing Contradictions

Despite the fact that this seems easy, it's not!

Once everyone understands the concept of contradiction, it's time to learn how to articulate one, or put it in a phrase. We've found that the best trick is to use "Despite" or "Yet" in the sentence. For example: "Despite the fact that this group's mission calls for democratic rule, one person really has all the power" or "This group's mission calls for democratic rule, yet one person really has all the power." This little trick will be very useful. It can help you sort out a complex idea and put it into contradiction form.

We've found that giving participants a situation and asking them to articulate the contradiction is useful. We often use a blurb from *Resist* that called for a boycott on the upscale Starbucks coffee bar chain. The story reveals that Starbucks treats their Guatemalan workers very poorly, which is in contradiction to their politically conscious image.

Objective:

to give participants practice articulating contradictions

Time Needed:

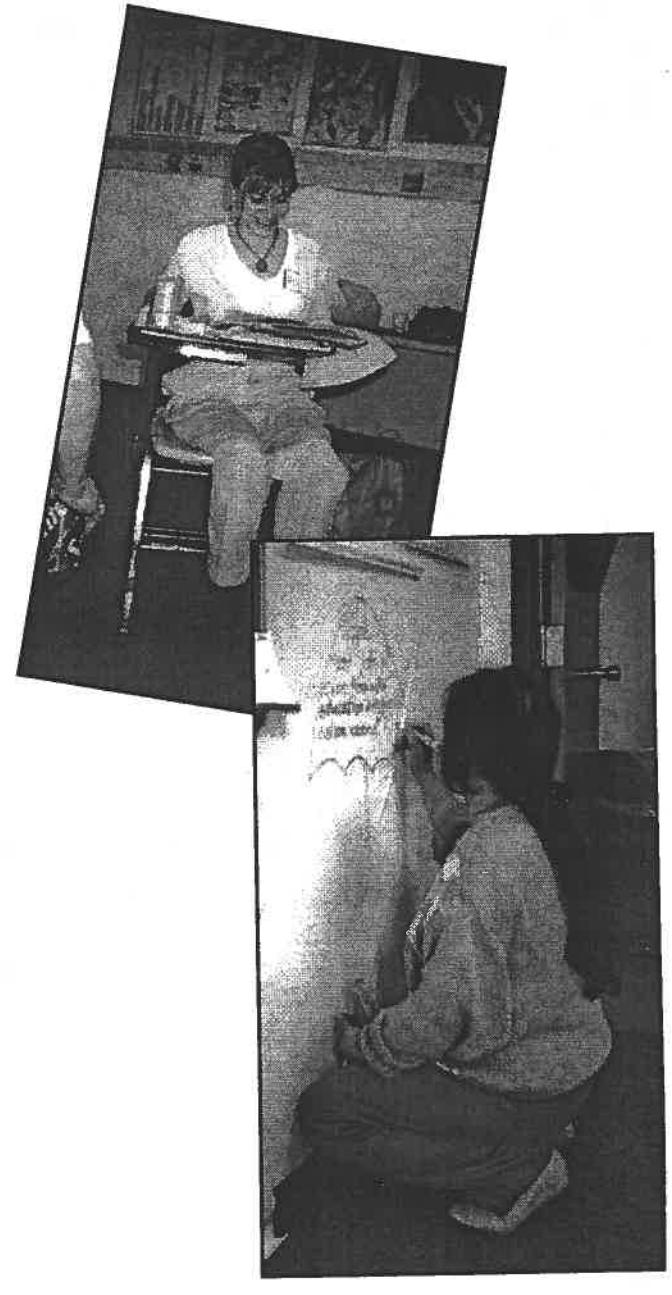
20 min.

Materials Needed:

a short story with an example of a contradiction

Instructions:

- Hand out an article that shows an example of a contradiction and ask the group to name the contradiction and then articulate it.



Note:

In order to keep track of the many contradictions that will come up over the course of the workshop, we build what we call the Wall of Contradictions. This is simply a long piece of butcher block paper. We pass out small pieces of paper for people to write contradictions on as they come up, and continually tape them to the wall.

History



"Know the Past, Make the Path."

Reading:
pp. 215-226 of
We Make the Road by Walking (Conversations on Education and Social Change)
by Myles Horton and Paulo Freire
(see bibliography)

We have always loved the saying "There is no path, we make the path by walking" and the simple way it reminds us that action and reflection will lead us onward. But we also feel that knowing about our history will help us on our journey. Just as it is crucial to identify the reality that we are living in at this moment — we also need to look at the historical context of this reality. We integrate a historical timeline into every coyuntural analysis workshop because we know the importance of understanding the struggles of the past in order to assess the present and plan for the future.

The People's Historical Timeline of Chicago

Just as our analysis is affected by the way we see the world, history books that we read in school are written with a particular point of view. The dominant viewpoint expressed in many of these books excludes the perspectives of people of color, women, children, people with disabilities and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people. We've tried to address that by creating our own history of Chicago in a timeline that was created by many of those excluded from mainstream history. The People's Historical Timeline of Chicago is an ongoing project — all participants in Praxis workshops contribute dates and information. The timeline has a section for events and trends specific to Chicago and Illinois and another section for national and international events and trends so that the Chicago history can be viewed in context. When we ask people to add dates, sometimes they research by looking in books, sometimes they talk to friends or relatives, sometimes they have general knowledge about their community. The timeline reflects the interests and knowledge of those who participated in creating it. Naturally, there are many holes in it that would probably upset a professional historian. But every time we do a workshop, someone fills in one of the gaps and we're confident that eventually they will all be filled.

Exercise: Know the Past, Make the Path



OPTION 1:
Historical Timeline of Chicago

Objective:

to give a context for our work in Chicago; to identify trends that may apply to our current situation; to point out the relations between apparently isolated events; to begin to think about contradictions

Time Needed:

one hour

Materials Needed:

Peoples' Historical Timeline of Chicago (contact AFSC Chicago), post-its, markers

Instructions:

We usually give copies of the timeline to participants a couple of weeks before the workshop. That way they have time to look at it and not only add new dates, but find events and trends in a category that they have been assigned. The categories that we usually use are: police/ crime, resistance, immigration/migration, labor/industry.

- Ask the group to break up into 4 small groups according to the categories that they were assigned. Each group will have 15 minutes to:
  - discuss the trends they noticed in their category and choose 2 or 3 to write on post-its and present to group
  - discuss the dates significant to their community that they found and put on post-its to present to group
  - add any new events or trends to post-its
  - at the end of the 15 minutes, make a presentation of their findings to the group
- Ask the group to notice trends and events that relate to their community or focus specifically and discuss.
- Discuss the idea of contradiction with the group to review the concept. Ask for examples of contradiction from the timeline, then focus on one time-period as a moment. We find that 1968 works really well because most people have some knowledge of that era. Have the group make a list of events that occurred in that time and then ask the group to find contradictions in that moment.

OPTION 2:
Historical Timeline

If you don't have a copy of our timeline you can still do a form of this exercise. All you will need is a large piece of butcher block paper, markers, tape, and post-its.

Instructions:

- Break the large group into several small groups. Each group will be asked to think of historical events and trends in three areas: family, community, and global/national history. They will write these on post-its and put them up on the large butcher block paper. You might want to write in a few key events and dates such as WWII 1939-45, just to give people reference points.
- At the end of the hour, make a presentation of their findings.
- Discuss the concept of contradiction with the group. Ask for examples of contradiction from the timeline.
- Focus on one time-period (perhaps 1968). Have the group make a list of events that occurred in that time and then ask group to find contradictions in that moment.

Vision



Reading:

"The Welder" by Cherríe Moraga in
This Bridge Called My Back (Writings by Radical Women of Color)
Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds.)
(see bibliography)

Our Vision of the Future

In addition to understanding the past, we need to be able to envision the future to move forward. We always try to spend some time with groups to not only explore each participant's individual vision, but to bring the group to a collective vision. This will help the group in the long term as they analyze, develop actions, analyze again, and so on. When an organization or community has a common vision of where they need to go, then they have a reason for the ongoing analysis and action.

Our Ideal School

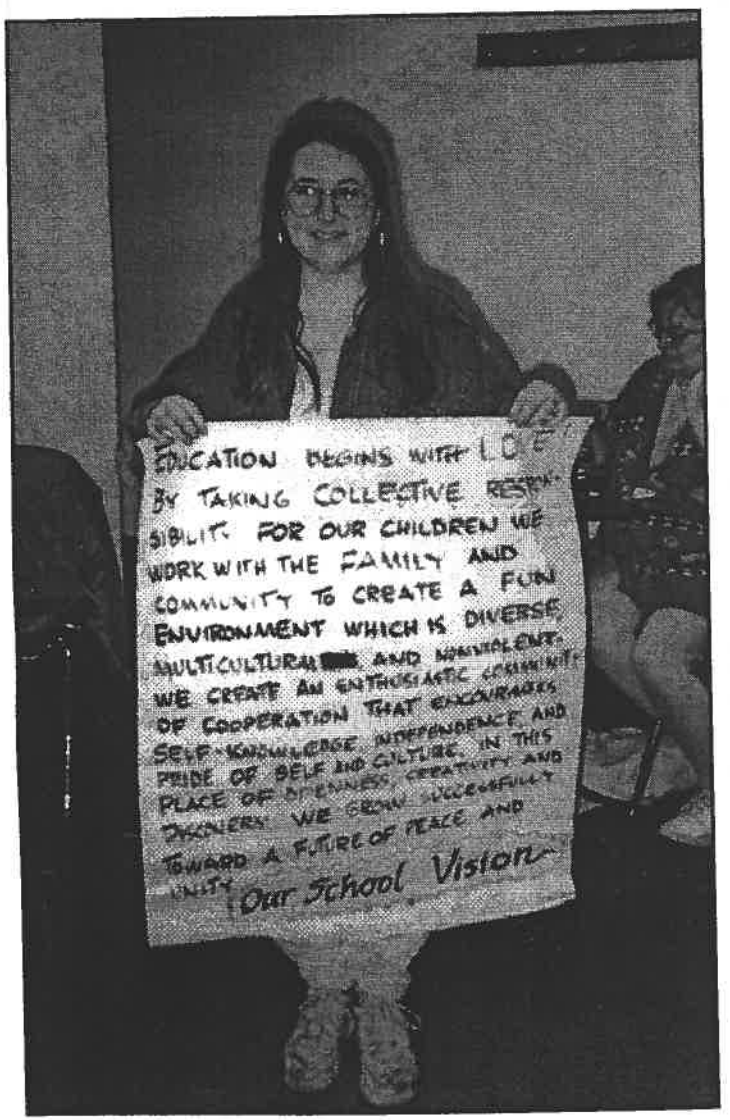
Chicago Public School teachers came up with this collective vision statement:

" Our ideal school will be an environment of teachers, parents, students, and community members working together. By integrating critical thinking, problem solving, and conflict resolution in an interdisciplinary, challenging, innovative, state-of-the-art curriculum. We will facilitate a multicultural consciousness, ecological connectiveness, illumination of self-awareness, and empowerment by collective actions that will contribute to a just, sound communal existence among peoples."

Photography as Metaphor

Often, when we're trying to come to a collective vision, we use drawings or photographs to spark everyone's creativity and imagination. In the exercise that follows, participants are asked to contribute images and respond to a series of photographs related to the focus of their analysis.

Exercise: Creating Collective Vision



Objective:

to generate discussion about individuals' visions and to help the group develop a collective vision

Time Needed:

one hour

Materials Needed:

collection of photos or xeroxes of photos, newsprint, markers

Instructions:

- Ask the group to bring to the workshop an image that inspires them or gives them hope. Ask the group to add their images to the collection if you have one, or just work with the images they bring in.

- Ask the group to consider these questions:
  - Which image represents what you believe in?
  - Which image represents what you want to avoid?
  - Which image reminds you of the ideal community?
  - Why does the image you brought in give you hope?

(Optional)

  - Have the group use the images they brought in to create a collage that reflects elements of their collective vision.

- Ask group to formulate a collective vision statement for their community.

Note:

We usually get a rough statement down from suggestions of the large group. Then we ask for 1 or 2 volunteers who are willing to take the rough draft home and work on it a little more before the next meeting. Then we'll start off the next meeting by looking at these 1 or 2 more polished statements and change and combine them in the large group to create a more finished statement.

Concept Review

Identity



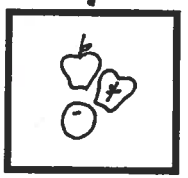
Spend some time looking at the make-up of your group and discussing how the composition of the group and their particular realities will affect the content of the analysis.

The Moment



Finding the current moment can be thought of as identifying the reality that exists for your community right now. Finding this moment and analyzing its elements to lead your community toward social change is the point of coyuntural analysis.

Analysis



Analysis is the process of taking a whole and breaking down its component parts to discover their nature.

Contradictions



Opposing forces that share a common element. For example: *Starbucks projects a socially conscious image to the public, yet they pay their Guatemalan coffee pickers terrible wages.*

Umbrella Contradictions



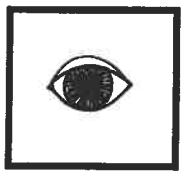
Fundamental contradictions are overarching or encompassing, like an umbrella. Secondary contradictions tend to be more specific or might be examples or evidence of the fundamental/ umbrella contradiction.

History



Just as it is crucial to identify the reality that we are living in at this moment — we need to look at the historical context of this reality.

Vision



Creating a common or shared vision within your group can help you stay on track as you continue the constant process of action and reflection.

The Matrix

The matrix is a tool for beginning to organize information that helps us to understand the concrete social reality of the moment. By looking at the political, economic, ideological, race and gender-based trends and events that relate to the focus of your analysis, you'll form a solid base of information from which to begin formulating contradictions.

- an **event** is a single historical incident or fact
- a series of events that can be seen as a pattern is a **trend**.

To fill in the matrix look for events and trends in each of the five categories mentioned that relate to the focus of your analysis on a local, national, or global level. **The trends and events in each category don't necessarily have to be related, but all should relate somehow to the focus of your analysis and be of the moment.**

	Political	Ideological	Economic	Race	Gender
Local	***Trend:*** continuous conflict between Republican Governor and Democrat Mayor ***Event:*** mayor's proposed development of Meig's Field airport into a park	***Trend:*** "self-reliance" as a means of survival, people using their differences to compete ***Event:*** privatization of social services	***Trend:*** privatization of school services ***Event:*** Chapter I funds for low-income schools cut	***Trend:*** police brutality against all minorities ***Event:*** the killing of homeless man Joseph Gould by an off-duty Chicago Police Officer	***Trend:*** sexual harassment in the schools ***Event:*** Black women's Expo
National	***Trend:*** anti-immigrant rhetoric in political campaigns ***Event:*** passage of Proposition 187 in California	***Trend:*** lack of an alternative to the dominant ideology ***Event:*** Republicans and Democrats espouse the same ideology	***Trend:*** privatization ***Event:*** Federal cuts threatened in education, social services	***Trend:*** militarization of border and associated violence ***Event:*** the Million Man March	***Trend:*** feminization of poverty ***Event:*** Hawaii courts okay same-sex marriages
Global	***Trend:*** multinational corporations' power overriding that of the nation-state ***Event:*** U.S. and China in power struggle over military exercises.	***Trend:*** neoliberalism ***Event:*** end of the cold war	***Trend:*** free-trade agreements ***Event:*** creation of the World Trade Organization	***Trend:*** people of color seen as expendable ***Event:*** lack of response to Rwanda/Burundi crisis	***Trend:*** exploitation of women in global economy ***Event:*** Beijing Women's Conference

Exercise: Developing the Matrix

Objective:
to gather and organize local, national, and international information — to identify the principal events/trends of the present moment and how they make an impact on the community

Time Needed:
one hour

Materials Needed:
simple posters that visually clarify each category, markers, tape, and task sheets (see page 47)

Instructions:
- It's a good idea to first clarify the terms you will be working with. We have developed definitions and examples for each one of these categories. Usually we ask the group for definitions and examples and then clarify them if needed. We have also developed posters with visual representations of each category (see photo).

- Split the group into five small groups: Political, Economic, Ideological, Race, and Gender and give each group a task sheet with examples.

- Each group should take about 15 minutes to:
  - Brainstorm at least one trend and event locally, nationally, and internationally that is related to the focus of their analysis and their category.

- Small groups share their findings with the large group
- Give the large group time to fill in any gaps that they notice overall

Political:
the power relations between peoples and groups

Ideology:
the realm of ideas; all mechanisms and processes that influence the consciousness of people, their ideas and values, tastes and feelings

Economic:
that which relates to the production, distribution and consumption of commodities and wealth

Gender:
socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles — in this category we will also consider sexual identity

Race:
persons connected by common descent and origin — in this category we will also consider culture and ethnicity



Identifying Contradictions



From Chicago Public School teachers analyzing the state of education in Chicago:

Despite the state's responsibility to fund all of our schools, the distribution of funds is grossly unequal according to location.

Despite the variety of cultures within the Chicago Public Schools, the curriculum does not reflect multiculturalism.

Now comes the hard work!

At this point, the group has gathered enough information to begin to articulate contradictions. You want the group to come up with as many contradictions as they can that relate to the focus of the analysis. If you've been collecting contradictions on the Wall of Contradictions all along, you should have a good supply of them. At this point you should weed through them and save only those that relate to the focus of your analysis. Here are some examples from our workshops:

From a group of artists and educators who work with youth in the Chicago neighborhood of Rogers Park, which was also the focus of the analysis:

There is plentiful housing in Rogers Park, yet people with children cannot take advantage of this housing because landlords discriminate against them.

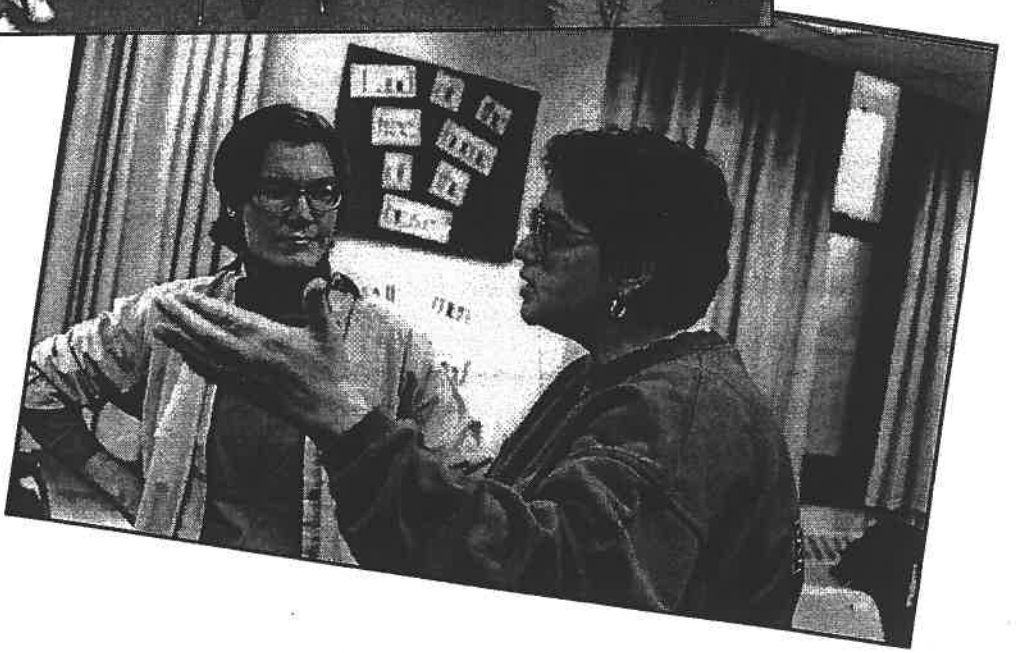
Despite the fact that many adults want to improve the lives of young people, young people are not allowed to participate in the decisions that affect them.

From a group of activists who work for the American Friends Service Committee, who were analyzing the United States:

Despite the large number of people adversely affected by the dominant ideology (neoliberalism, individualism), there is no mass assertion of an alternative ideology.

Exercise: Identifying Contradictions





Objective:

to use the information gathered thus far to identify the contradictions surrounding the focus of the analysis

Time Needed:

30 min.

Materials Needed:

Wall of Contradictions, markers, paper, tape

Instructions:

- Refer to all the contradictions found on the Wall of Contradictions. Read them out loud and then ask the group to brainstorm any others. These will be written down and added.
- If you haven't been writing down contradictions all along, give the group some extra time to brain storm; or give them "homework" and have them come to the next meeting prepared with several contradictions.

Principal Contradiction

This is an important contradiction, yet...

This is the most difficult part of the analysis. At this point, the group will be choosing a **principal contradiction** from among the assembled contradictions. This contradiction will be the focus of the rest of the analysis, allowing the group to use their new analytical tools. Choosing the principal contradiction is like looking for a small lever that controls a big machine — the principal contradiction should be easy to grasp and maneuver, yet powerful in its implications. Because you're going to spend so much time on this principal contradiction, you'd better make sure it's a good one! These are a few things we've discovered through many hours of sweat and discussion.

A good principal contradiction will be:

- one that is specific to the current historical moment
- one that is specific to the focus of your analysis

Without these elements, you may end up with a very general principal contradiction that is really more structural in nature and not of the moment. Coyuntural analysis focuses on the moment because this specificity allows activists to find openings for action that will have an effect on that contradiction. If the contradiction is too structural or too general, it probably will leave the group feeling overwhelmed and unable to act. If the focus of your analysis is very broad, like the United States or the City of Chicago — you are likely to find that your contradictions are more general. With a more specific focus, like the neighborhood of Rogers Park or education in Chicago, you'll come up with more specific contradictions.

Note:

A contradiction that is structural in nature may seem similar to the concept of the umbrella contradiction - and it is related. However, you can have an overarching, or umbrella contradiction that is still related to the moment and the focus of the analysis. The concern here is that your contradiction doesn't become too structural. Compare the examples on this page with those on page 18.

... we need to make it more specific!

For example, several groups that we have worked with initially came up with similar principal contradictions, even though they were very different groups doing different analyses. One group was made up of Chicago Public School teachers who were analyzing the city of Chicago. The other group consisted of activists who work for the American Friends Service Committee who were analyzing the United States. Both groups came up with a principal contradiction that said basically: "Although there is a democratic system in place, most people do not have the opportunity to participate in this democracy." Well, was that true 10 years ago, 50 years ago, even 200 years ago? Yes. Is this contradiction true not only in Chicago or the United States but in other places? Yes. This left us with a big contradiction that was too unwieldy.

Each group had to use this contradiction as a starting point and make it more specific to the moment and to their focus. Here's what they came up with:

Chicago Public School Teachers:

Every community is represented in the Chicago City Council, yet some communities receive more resources than other communities.

AFSC activists:

Tax breaks and subsidies for the elite and the military are largely responsible for the debt, yet both the Republicans and the Democrats are trying to balance the budget by cutting social programs.

Exercise: Choosing the Principal Contradiction

Objective:

to prioritize and choose the principal contradiction

Time Needed:

1-3 hours (it's hard to tell, leave it open-ended if you can)

Materials Needed:

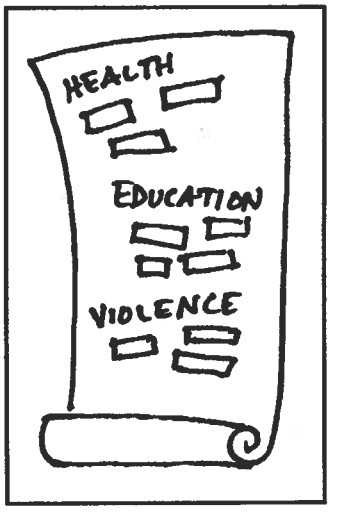
markers, colored paper, tape, newsprint

Instructions:

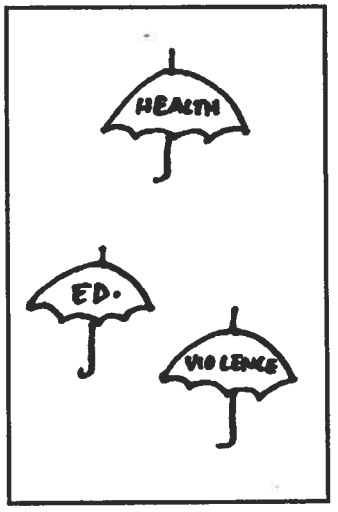
- **Assemble all contradictions:** You've already done this in the previous step. Now your group needs to decide what the criteria will be for choosing the principal contradiction. Most groups feel that the principal contradiction should be the one that is hurting the people the most, that has the most potential to mobilize people, etc.
- **Categorize:** We've found that if you ask a group to choose a principal contradiction at this point, they will naturally respond to those contradictions that are more overarching or structural in nature. You'll find that many of the contradictions you've assembled will overlap and fall under similar categories. In order to make sure that all important ideas are considered, we try to identify 3 or 4 categories which will include all of the contradictions. Then we break the large group up according to the categories to find the umbrella contradictions in each category.
- **Make umbrella contradictions** (refer to page 18)**:** Again this is a good point to make sure that each umbrella contradiction could be a good principal contradiction (it pertains to the moment and relates to the focus of the analysis).
- **Choose principal contradiction:** Choose the principal contradiction from the umbrella contradictions based upon criteria that the group developed earlier.



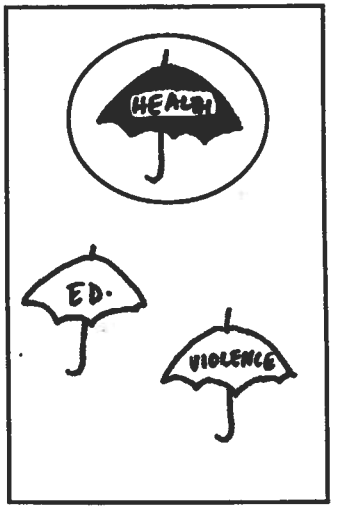
1. Assemble all Contradictions



2. Categorize

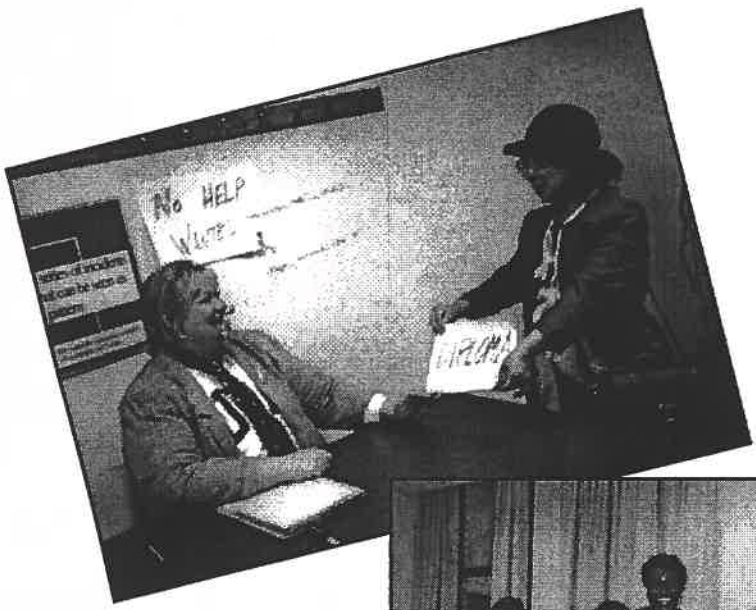


3. Make umbrella contradictions



4. Choose principal contradiction

Codes





Reading:

"Poetics of the Oppressed" from *Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal (see bibliography)

Cracking the Code

The *code* is a tool developed by Paulo Freire in his literacy work in Brazil. A code is a representation of a theme, issue, or problem. A code is open-ended, so that various solutions and strategies can be discussed in response. The best codes come from real life experiences. Codes can be photos, drawings, skits, or videos.

Your Life on Stage!

Often when we work with codes, we use them in the manner of another Brazilian, Augusto Boal. In his method (called Theatre of the Oppressed), participants create their own codes in the form of skits. In this exercise, the group is asked to break into small groups and come up with a code that represents some situation that they have witnessed or experienced as the result of the principal contradiction.

Elements of a Code:

- It should represent a familiar situation — try to base this skit on experience from your own life or a story that you've heard in the community
- It should be presented as a problem without a solution but open to many differing points of view
- Your skit should take no longer than 3-5 minutes.

Exercise: Exploring the Principal Contradiction

Objective:

to explore various ramifications of the principal contradiction through the exercise of producing a code

Time Needed:

1 1/2-2 hours

Materials Needed:

task sheet on codes (see page 46)

Instructions:

- Ask the group to begin to consider how the principal contradiction affects people in the community. Break the group into smaller groups of 2-4 people and ask each group to settle on one situation that illustrates an effect of the principal contradiction.
- Each group is responsible for performing a 3-5 minute code about this situation.
- Each group will be given a task sheet that explains the concept of codes, and can use this as a reference. If you can arrange it, sometimes it's fun to give this as homework. That way groups can bring in props and costumes.
- When each group performs their code, lead the large group through a series of questions:
  - What did you see physically happen?
  - What could it represent?
  - Have you seen this situation in real life?
  - Who were the characters (seen and unseen) that make up this situation? (*Write these down for the next exercise.*)

Example:

A group of Chicago Public School Teachers did a code that reflected an aspect of this contradiction:

Despite the law which states that all people are guaranteed free and equal educational opportunities, Chicago Public Schools continue to promote inequality by their actions and methodologies, as seen in the recent rulings by the Valas administration.



The code consisted of a woman who was obviously playing a student coming out into the room and playing, jumping, skipping. She eventually gets down on her knees.



Two women come into the room, eating cookies, and rest their weight on the student. The women represent teachers. Two more women come out, eating more cookies, and rest their weight on the first two. They represent middle bureaucrats.



Finally, a man comes in, eating a large sub sandwich. He comes in smiling, laughing and waving, while the student at the bottom buckles under the weight. He places himself at the top of the crumbling pyramid — he represents the leadership of the School Board.

Actors



Four Legs Good, Two Legs Baaaaaad!

We have found that the film version of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a great tool for teaching concepts in coyuntural analysis. We often have participants watch it over lunch and then fill out worksheets that ask them to find the various concepts of coyuntural analysis in the film. For instance, they can list the actors involved: Snowball, Old Major, Napoleon, Farmer Brown, etc. They can name contradictions that are part of the story ("All Animals are Equal, But some Animals Are More Equal Than Others"). They can talk about a moment when forces converged, they can talk about Snowball's vision. It's also a good way to segue into diagramming the relationship of forces (see page 36). People can draw a diagram that shows Napoleon's cooptation of the dogs, his relative power position over the other animals, and so on.

We have found this cartoon film version of *Animal Farm* to be widely available at public libraries and commercial video rental stores.

Who is Who and Who is Working with Whom?

These are the questions participants try to answer as the next step of their analysis. This is the first step in a power analysis. It is important to not only identify who the key *actors* (individuals and institutions involved in the principal contradiction) are — it's important to know how they interact.

For example, one African American group analyzing Chicago came up with a principal contradiction about violence. When they identified all of the individuals and groups of people who were affected by or working on this issue, they started to think about whether or not these groups were in support of the principal contradiction, against the principal contradiction, or neutral. They were dismayed to discover that none of the community organizations they listed that were specifically African American could be listed as against the principal contradiction, or in other words, as allies. All of these organizations were listed as neutral. This discovery led them to the realization that they needed to start forming strategic alliances with these untapped potential allies.

Exercise: Actors/ Common Interests

Objective:

to begin to assess the actors involved in the principal contradiction, their positions and their common interests

Time Needed:

45 min.

Materials Needed:

slips of paper, markers

Instructions:

- Spend 15 minutes brainstorming all the actors (individuals and institutions) involved in the principal contradiction that aren't already listed from the code exercise. Choose 10-15 principal actors. Write them down on slips of paper.

- Pass out the slips. Each participant takes a slip and reads it to themselves, not sharing what is written on it. Ask each participant to imagine that they are the person or institution written on the slip. They are to think of that person's top 3 priorities, concerns or interests in this situation.

- Each participant walks around the room talking to others and finding out their interests. When s/he finds someone with common interests, they stick together and look for others — while still keeping their identities a secret.

- After about 10 minutes of mingling, have the group guess the identity of each person. Ask the group which cluster of actors supports the principal contradiction, which cluster is against it and which cluster is neutral.



Opportunities for Change

Almost Done!

This is the final step in the analysis. Participants consider all of the information that they have collected and begin to look for "windows of opportunity" or "free space" — an *opening* for activists to get in and make some change in the principal contradiction, and thus in their communities.

What Makes An Opening?

Think of an opening as an opportunity. Remember, you started your analysis with a large amount of information gathered in the matrix. From this information you developed contradictions and then chose a principal contradiction. Once you found this principal contradiction, you took it apart further. You explored the consequences of this contradiction, you identified the actors participating in this contradiction, and you diagrammed the relationship of forces in this contradiction. Now you can use all of this information to find an opening where your group might find some leverage to change this contradiction.

The group can look for openings by using the diagrams from the preceding exercise — for example, possibilities for strategic alliances for coalitions might become evident. Another way to look for openings is to consider upcoming events and current trends for their possible impact upon the principal contradiction. After your group has found some openings, they can choose one and then strategically plan how they are going to utilize it.



What the Teachers Found...

"Local School Councils were initiated to increase parental and community involvement in decision making, assessment, and funding, yet the actual power for funding and curriculum is still in the State Legislature — leading to division and chaos on a local level." This was the principal contradiction analyzed by a group of Chicago Public School Teachers. From their analysis they found several openings including:

- **Contract Negotiations**. Upcoming Chicago Teacher's Union contract talks might provide a forum for raising awareness in the public at large and possibly provide a lever for change.
- **Strategic Alliances**. The Relationship of Forces exercise revealed that there was a rift between teachers and the Local School Councils. Our group felt that by trying to form stronger alliances with the LSCs, perhaps together they could put some pressure on the state legislature.
- **A Community Newsletter**. Because the Chicago Public School system has a bad public image, our group felt that a newsletter that would raise public awareness of the struggles that teachers face might help form alliances between community groups and teachers.

Exercise: The Forum Theatre



Brainstorm

Depending on how much time you have left at the end of the session, you can look for openings in a couple of different ways. When we are pressed for time, we often run this as a brainstorm session, asking the group to work together to consider the information they have and look for openings.

The Spect-actor Looks for Openings

We have been experimenting with a Theatre of the Oppressed technique — The Forum Theatre — as a way to find openings. By participating in an active way during this and other Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, spectators become spect-actors! Use this as a way to get your group to think creatively, then spend some time brainstorming afterwards.

Objective:

to use the information gathered thus far to find a path for action

Time Needed:

one hour

Materials Needed:

task sheet on Forum Theatre

Instructions:

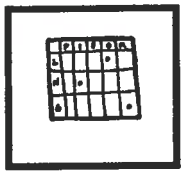
- Break into small groups. Each group is to create a short code about the principal contradiction. This code should contain:
  - some of the Primary Actors (individuals or institutions)
  - a protagonist (the person being affected by the principal contradiction)
  - no solution
- Each small group performs their code. The large group chooses **one** code that they think is closest to real life and that they think represents the principal contradiction, or an aspect of it.
- Perform the chosen code a second time. This time the audience can stop the performance at any time by yelling "STOP!"
- Whoever yelled "STOP!" must come onstage and take the place of the protagonist and try to handle the problem in a different way. The audience watches this new protagonist and decides what is being done differently.
- The audience can yell "STOP!" at any time and replace the new protagonist. Before this is done, however, the entire group should discuss what was done differently by the new protagonist. Did the situation change for the better? What were the techniques used by the new protagonist to change the situation?
- Perform the code once more, with the person who yelled "STOP!" last time replacing the protagonist to try a new solution. The process can be repeated for as long as the group comes up with new ideas.
- Discuss which solution is the best solution. Begin a brainstorm session about how this solution could be implemented by the community.

Reading:

"Forum Theatre, Doubts and Certainties"
pp. 224-245 in
Games for Actors and Non-Actors
by Augusto Boal
(see bibliography)

Process Review

The Matrix



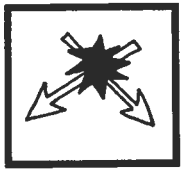
The Matrix is a tool for beginning to organize information on your topic through economic, political, ideological, race and gender-based trends and events locally, nationally and globally.

Actors



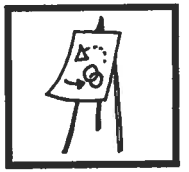
Part of analyzing the principal contradiction is naming the individuals and institutions that are part of it.

Identifying Contradictions



Your group will spend some time identifying contradictions that exist within the focus that you have chosen. Don't forget to use *despite* or *yet* when you phrase the contradiction.

The Relationship of Forces



Find out how the forces involved in the principal contradiction intersect and interact to deepen your understanding.

Choosing/ Exploring the Principal Contradiction



Your group will follow the process to select the principal contradiction and then expand it using codes as a tool.

Opportunities for Change



Use the information you have gathered thus far to explore opportunities for change, or a crack in the pillar, if you will.

A Word About Strategic Planning



Fill Up That Opening with Some Action!!!

Once your group has discovered some openings, then they will have to decide which one they would like to work on. Your group will have to decide what criteria they are using to decide which opening is the best. After you've chosen the opening, you need to decide what strategies will work within that opening. For instance, if the Chicago Public School Teachers (see page 38) had decided that their best opening was the contract negotiations — then they would have had to decide how to go about using this event. One strategy might be to pressure the union to call a strike. Another, less dramatic strategy might be to arrange meetings between the union and the Local School Councils to decide how the contract negotiations could be used as leverage to bring more power to the LSCs.

Today — City Hall, Tomorrow — Who Knows?

Remember, because your analysis of the moment was what led you to the opening that you chose, your strategic plan is going to focus on the short term. You should, however, keep in mind your group's long-term goals for social change.

Let's Get to Work

In this short-term planning you need to be very concrete. Your group should look at the strategy they've chosen and ask themselves these questions:

- What alliances need to be formed to promote this strategy?
- What tasks and activities are needed?
- Who is responsible for performing each task?
- Do sub-committees need to be formed? If so, who will be in charge of each sub-committee?
- What is your timeline — in other words, how long is it going to take your group to implement these tasks and activities?
- How will your group evaluate this strategy?

After you've got that settled, then you can go to work. Remember, the moment is always changing — forces in society are always moving. In addition, after your group has implemented its strategy there may be a change. After your group has evaluated the success of its strategy, you can move on to repeating a few steps from the process section of the book to analyze the coyuntura again!

Reading:

"Planning for Action" in
Counting Our Victories: Popular Education and Organizing
by Denise Nadeau
(see bibliography)

Conclusion

We Tried to Make this Book Easy to Understand, Yet You're Probably Still Confused...

We know that no matter how hard we've tried to make this book clear and concise, you probably won't fully understand the process until you've gone through it with a group. We do hope that we've given you some tools to make your first foray into coyuntural analysis a little easier.

In trying to make this book easy to understand, we sacrificed a few things. We were not able to convey all the complexity and nuance inherent in this process. We've been studying and working with the process for over two years and we still discover new things about it all the time.

In addition, our attempt to convey concepts in a clear manner led us to order them in a certain way. We also wanted to give you ideas about how to use the concepts so we included exercises. Unfortunately, this may lead some of you to believe that this is the only way to do coyuntural analysis. This is simply not true! We can't emphasize enough that this book is a compilation of our experiences with community groups and activists in Chicago — your experiences will be different. Use your imagination and change exercises according to your needs, or make up completely different ones.

There is No Escape

Ultimately, we hope we've introduced you to a new way of thinking. We have found that the skills and concepts that we learned through working on coyuntural analysis have infiltrated all of our other work. In fact, they have seeped into our daily lives! People in our office think in contradictions automatically now. We find many situations, such as conflict resolution and long-term strategic planning where we can use pieces of coyuntural analysis to help move the process along.

We hope that these concepts will help further your work for social change.

Good Luck!



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Glossary

Actor:
an individual or institution who plays a part in a situation or problem
Example: The Chicago Teachers Union, the mayor and students are all actors in the situation that surrounds the Chicago school reform movement.

Analysis:
taking a whole and separating it into its individual segments; a way of looking carefully and critically at a complex subject

Code:
a representation of a theme, issue, or problem; codes can be used to stimulate discussion and can take the form of skits, drawings, videos, or photographs

Conjuncture: (see coyuntural analysis)
The English equivalent of the Spanish word *coyuntura;* the forces and circumstances that converge at a given moment

Contradiction:
a situation in which forces in opposition share a common element
Example: Some public officials support public education officially, yet their own children attend private schools.

Coyuntural Analysis:
a type of critical analysis that examines the dynamic relationship of forces that affect our lives at one point in time; coyuntural analysis looks at race, gender, and the ideological, political and economic sectors of our society at a given moment and how they interrelate
Example: Workers who cross picket lines are working against their real class interests. A structural analysis would not be able to fully explain this contradiction. This contradiction might be more fully explained as part of a coyuntural analysis — one that takes into account the dynamic nature of race, gender, and the ideological, political and economic forces (see example under structural analysis for contrast).

Economic:
that which relates to the production, distribution and consumption of commodities and wealth

Event:
a single historical incident or fact

Forces:
social groups or institutions which shape events — these groups represent particular interests, dominant or oppressed; the physics definition of force is similar: an influence which produces or tends to produce motion or change of motion
Example: The Peace and Justice Radio Project is an ideological force for community media access. The FCC is a political force against community media access. The Crossroads Fund is an economic force for community media access.

Gender:
socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles

Ideology:
the realm of ideas; all the mechanisms and processes utilized to influence the consciousness of the people, in their ideas and values, as much as their tastes and feelings; religion, education, media, entertainment, advertising

Opening:
the opportunity offered at each given moment to take action; openings can also be thought of as "room to move," free space, windows of opportunity
Example: Parents who wanted to prevent the closing of their children's school determined there were not many options. This constraint led to their recognition of free space and consequently the decision to take the action of a hunger strike.

Political:
the power relations between people and groups; laws, government, the judicial system

Praxis:
a dynamic relationship of action and reflection.

Race:
persons connected by common descent and origin

Strategic Planning:
a way of utilizing openings for change and mapping out tasks, activities, goals and objectives

Structural Analysis:
a method of analysis that helps us to identify the underlying power relationships and the deeper conflicts that determine the framework of our society
Example: With a structural analysis you can see that certain aspects of society are relatively permanent, such as economic relations between owners and workers (see example under coyuntural for contrast).

Synthesis:
a process of reasoning; putting the pieces back together to form a new whole; taking the principles and propositions established or assumed and proceeding in a direct manner to the conclusion

Trend:
a general path or direction; a series of events that can be seen as a pattern

Task Sheet: Codes

A code is a representation of an issue, theme, or problem.

In this exercise you will produce a code representing a situation that may arise as a result of the principal contradiction. Your code will take the form of a simple skit that will include the following characteristics:

- It should represent a familiar situation — try to base this skit on experience from your own life.
- It should be presented as a problem without a solution but open to many differing points of view.
- Your skit should take no longer than 3-5 minutes.

Example:

Principal contradiction: Teachers in School X are mostly white, yet the student body of School X is mostly Latino. This conversation between a seventh grader and her white teacher points out problems that could arise from the cultural differences between them.

Ms. Parker: Marcela, what happened to you yesterday? You weren't in school, now don't tell me you were sick.

Marcela: No, but my grandmother was sick and I had to go with her to the hospital.

Ms. Parker: Let her go by herself or let your mother take her!

Marcela: My mom was at work and my grandmother doesn't speak any English so I have to translate for her.

Ms. Parker: You can't keep missing class or you'll never catch up! We started working on a science experiment yesterday and now you don't have a partner.

Marcela: There is nothing I can do — my parents expect me to help my grandmother.

Ms. Parker: Don't your parents care about your education? I'm not going to let you advance to the next grade unless you stop missing school.

Task Sheet: Matrix

Think of at least two **ECONOMIC** trends or events locally, nationally, and internationally.

Economic: that which relates to the production, distribution and consumption of commodities and wealth

an economic trend is the movement toward privatization

an economic event might be a drastic budget cut

Think of at least two **GENDER** related trends or events locally, nationally, and internationally.

Gender:
socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles — in this category we will also consider sexual identity

a gender related trend is the movement of many states to adopt anti-gay /lesbian civil rights legislation

a gender related event might be the firing of an outspoken feminist professor at a university

Think of at least two **IDEOLOGICAL** trends or events locally, nationally and internationally.

Ideology: the realm of ideas — all mechanisms and processes utilized to influence the consciousness of people, in their ideas and values, as much as their tastes and feelings; religion, media, education, advertising

an ideological trend is the espousal of "family values"

an ideological event an election that brings a conservative majority to power

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Think of at least two **POLITICAL** trends or events locally, nationally, and internationally.

Political: The power relations between people and groups

a political trend is the Christian Right gaining power in the Republican party

a political event is the formation of an African American political party

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Think of at least two **RACE** related trends or events locally, nationally, and internationally.

Race:
persons connected by common descent and origin — in this category we will also consider culture and ethnicity

a race related trend is the growing opposition to affirmative action programs

a race related event is the passing of Proposition 187 in California