

Appendix A

REPRODUCIBLE HANDOUT

Key Concepts in Adult Development

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Constructive–developmental: This core set of theories is “constructive–developmental,” a term that joins together two different schools of thought. *Constructivists* believe that the world isn’t out there to be discovered, but that we create our world by our discovery of it. Humans make meaning of their surroundings, and that meaning *is* the surrounding; two people who see the same picture differently may actually, in their seeing of it, be creating two different pictures. *Developmentalists* believe that humans grow and change over time and enter qualitatively different phases as they grow. Cognitive, moral, and social development, however, unlike physical development, isn’t a matter of simply waiting for nature to take its course. Development can be helped or hindered (and in some severe cases arrested) by the individual’s life experiences. *Constructive–developmentalists* believe that the systems by which people make meaning grow and change over time.

Information: In-form-ation is new knowledge that you add to the current *form* of your mind. New skills or knowledge may be important for keeping up with the newest technology or the latest cutting-edge work in your profession. Information, however, while helpful, is generally by itself not a sufficient kind of growth for adults. Often the thing that needs to change, however, is not *what* we know but *how* we know. If how we know needs to change, we need more than information; we need *transformation*.

Transformation: Transformation is more than simply adding information into a container (your mind, for example) that already exists. Transformation is about changing the very *form* of the container—making it larger, more complex, more able to deal with complexity and uncertainty. Transformation occurs, according

to Harvard Professor Robert Kegan, when you are newly able to step back and reflect on something and make decisions about it. There are many ways that transformation can happen; one of them is the movement of things from “subject” to “object” (see below). Robert Kegan says transformative learning happens when someone changes “not just the way he behaves, not just the way he feels, but the way he knows—not just what he knows but the *way* he knows.”¹

Subject: Things that are subject are by definition experienced as unquestioned, simply a part of the self. They can include many different things—a relational issue, a personality trait, an assumption about the way the world works, behaviors, or emotions. Things that are subject to you can’t be seen because they are a part of you. Because they can’t be seen, they are taken for granted, taken for true—or not even taken at all. You generally can’t name things that are “subject,” and you certainly can’t reflect upon them—that would require the ability to stand back and take a look at them. You don’t *have* something that’s subject; something that’s subject *has you*. For example, I once thought that all people learn things in basically the same way—the way I learned them. When students came to me with difficulty about an assignment or test, I thought the problem was *theirs*; I was being so clear and they were still not learning. I struggled and struggled to help them learn, but to no avail. I was subject to my own teaching and learning styles. I didn’t know different styles existed (because I figured everyone taught and learned like me), so I was powerless to change my style to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Object: Object is the opposite of subject. Again, something that is object can be a relational issue, personality trait, or a belief about the world. While things that are subject *have you*, you *have* things that are object. While all of us necessarily have many parts of our world to which we are subject (if we gave much conscious thought to our assumptions about gravity, we might not have time to go to sleep at night!), one part of development is about moving more and more things from subject to object. The more in your life you take as object, the more complex your worldview because you can see and act upon more things. In the example above, as I struggled to help my students learn, I found out about teaching and learning styles—especially as they relate to personality type. For the first time I could examine something I hadn’t even known existed before—my own teaching and learning styles—and I could take action to help my students be more successful. What was once unknown and unnamed—subject—became within my ability to reflect on—as object. The most profound example of a move from subject to object is when the entire meaning-making system moves from that which unquestioningly runs me to that which I can actively take charge of and control. This

shift of entire systems from subject to object is what gives form to the five forms of mind.

Forms of mind: There are five forms of mind, ranging from a 2-year-old to a (mostly theoretical) person well into the second half of life.² Each form is a qualitative shift in the meaning-making and complexity from the form before it. We do not give up what we've learned in a previous form of mind; we grow new capacities like rings on a tree, including and transcending our previous ways of making sense of the world.³ Perhaps the most important thing to remember about the forms of mind is that, while they become more complex with time, there is no form of mind that is inherently *better* than any other form (just as a more complex idea isn't necessarily more valuable than a simple one). People can be kind or unkind, just or unjust, moral or immoral at any of these forms of mind, so it is impossible to measure a person's worth by looking at his or her form of mind. What is more important is the *fit* between the mind and the task each person is required to do. Each of the five forms of mind is described briefly below, but the ones to pay closest attention to are the ones where the majority of adults spend most of their lives—the socialized mind and the self-authored mind. To help understand this system, I'm going to offer a fictional small village made up of members from all five forms of mind. I'll give the people in the village roles based on the strengths of their particular mind.

Magical childhood mind (mostly young children): Psychologist Jean Piaget was the first to point out that young children cannot yet hold the idea of “durable objects”—which is the notion that things in the world retain the same qualities over time. When they look out an airplane and see how small people look, they believe the people actually *are* small. A child with this form of mind believes that others in their lives can live in his mind and is mystified when others hold different opinions (about what the best color is, for instance) or can't pick right up on a game in an imaginary world. When water is poured from one container to another, and the quantity of the water looks different, he believes the water actually has grown (or shrunk), and no amount of persuasion will convince him otherwise. He believes he can slip down the drain in the tub because he can't hold himself as different from the water that slips away. Children in this form of mind need to be reminded of the rules over and over, because they can't hold the ideas in their mind for very long; the rule that existed yesterday about drawing on the walls might not seem to apply today. The magical childhood mind is a time of magic and mystery as the world inexplicably changes from second to second. If we imagine a member of our village with this form of mind, we'd see someone who needs constant supervision

and is not yet ready to police himself because he simply can't remember the laws from moment to moment (we'd keep him firmly under adult supervision). His job is to learn about the world.

The self-sovereign mind (older children—7 to 10—and adolescents, but also some adults): When children learn that objects stay the same no matter what their own relationship is to the object (when I walk away from the car and it looks smaller, the car isn't actually shrinking), their world becomes less magical and more complex. They discover that they have beliefs and feelings that remain constant over time, as well (I love chocolate but hate mashed potatoes; I'm great at ice skating). This insight lets them know that other people have opinions and beliefs that remain constant, too. Their concrete understandings let them know that a rule yesterday is probably a rule today, too. Their orientation is to figuring out how to get past the rule if it is in their way. While they are aware that others have feelings and desires, true empathy isn't possible for them yet because the distance between their minds and other minds is so great. Mostly other people's interests are important only if they interfere with the interests of the person with a self-sovereign form of mind. When irritating rules are not broken, it's because of a fear of being caught; when friends don't lie to each other even when they're tempted to, it's because of a fear of retaliation. Children—and adults—at this stage are self-centered because theirs is the only perspective they rightfully know how to take. A villager with this form of mind follows the laws because she's afraid of punishment; if the laws don't seem to meet her needs and she can find a way to break them with minimal risk, she will. We can count on her to work in her own best interests, so we'll give her a job that is in her own best interests (like tending a garden for her family) that has clear boundaries and limited scope. We'll also make sure that she is fairly well supervised by others.

The socialized mind (older adolescents and the *majority* of adults): People with this form of mind no longer see others as simply a means to an ends; they have developed the ability to subordinate their desires to the desires of others. Their impulses and wishes, to which they were subject when they had more of a self-sovereign mind, have become objects for their reflection and decision making. They internalize the feelings and emotions of others and are guided by those people or institutions (like an organization or synagogue or a political party) that are most important to them. They are able to think abstractly, be self-reflective about their actions and the actions of others, and are devoted to something that's greater than their own needs. The major limitation of this form of mind is that, when there is a conflict between important others (or between a single important other—like a

partner, and an institution—like a political party), people with a socialized mind feel torn in two and cannot find a way to make a decision. There is no sense of what *I* want outside of others' expectations or societal roles. This is generally admirable in teenagers, but, in adults, it can often seem like a personality flaw. As Kegan notes, "When I live in this balance as an adult I am the prime candidate for the assertiveness trainer, who may tell me that I need to learn how to stand up for myself, be more 'selfish,' less pliable, and so on, as if these were mere skills to be added on to whoever else I am. The popular literature will talk about me as lacking self-esteem, or as a pushover because I want other people to like me."⁴ Kegan goes on to point out that the very notion of "self-esteem" is inappropriate at this order, because self-esteem implies an *internal* source for feeling good about oneself. Those with a socialized mind don't have an independently constructed self to feel good about; their esteem is reliant on others because they are, in many ways, made up of those people, ideas, or ideals around them. A villager with this form of mind could be a model citizen⁵ and may follow the laws out of loyalty to the others in the village (or his religion or his organization or his family). He tries hard not to break the rules because he wouldn't want to feel he had let others down. In our small, homogenous village, someone with a socialized form of mind can hold nearly any position that doesn't require independent leadership. He can be a teacher, have his own business, or be a member of the military. As long as he has someone whom he respects to help him make difficult decisions, he can do nearly anything in this village.

The self-authored mind (some adults): Adults with a self-authored form of mind have achieved all that those with a more-socialized mind have, but now they have created a *self* that exists even outside of its relationship to others. The opinions and desires of others that they internalized and that had great control over them when they were making meaning with more of a socialized form of mind are now object to them. They are now able to examine those various rule systems and opinions and are able to mediate between them. Those with a self-authored form of mind have an internal set of rules and regulations—a self-governing system—which they use to make their decisions or mediate conflicts. Unlike those with the earlier self-sovereign form of mind, those who are more self-authored can empathize with others, and consider the wishes and opinions of others when making decisions. Unlike those with a more-socialized form of mind, though, those who are more self-authored don't feel torn apart by the conflicting opinions of other people, theories, or ideas because they have their own system with which to make decisions. Instead, they feel torn when their own internal values are in

competition. These are the people we read about in the literature who “own” their work, who are self-guided, self-motivated, self-evaluative. A villager at this form of mind would make a good mayor because she has her own internal governing system. She could create the rules from her internal system and fight hard to protect those rules. This guidance would help the village run smoothly according to her inner vision of village life. The self-authored mayor may not be an excellent diplomat, however, because when other people don’t understand or see the need to follow her rules, she may be so invested in her own way of doing things that she cannot easily see connections between her ideas of what is right and other people’s ideas of what is right.

The self-transforming mind (very few adults): Adults who have a self-transforming form of mind have achieved all that those who are more self-authored have, but they have learned the limits of their own inner system—and the limits of having an inner system in general. Instead of viewing others as people with separate and different inner systems, those with a self-transforming mind see across inner systems to look at the similarities that are hidden inside what used to look like differences. For example, they see that the ways that ideas like homosexuality and heterosexuality actually create one another, that there would be no word that described sexual preference if there weren’t more than one option. People with this form of mind are less likely to see the world in terms of dichotomies or polarities. They are more likely to believe that what we often think of as black and white are just various shades of gray whose differences are made more visible by the lighter or darker colors around them. A villager with this mind might be an elder whose job it is to mediate conflicts between the many villages. While he generally follows the laws set by the mayor, he sees that the many different villages have a variety of laws that are basically designed to do similar things, and that the differences are much more like similarities than any of the mayors can see. He helps the mayors find a common ground and reminds them that they are all members of a larger community—the community of human beings, perhaps, or of members of our planet.

THE POINT OF IT ALL

Development is not a race to the finish line. There’s no prize for being the most self-transformational on your death bed or the first in your high school class to become self-authored. Development isn’t just about this theory or these forms of mind; it is the journey of our lives, the way we come to see and re-see the world around us.

Paying attention to someone's particular form of mind is not going to change the world. Paying attention to the sensemaking of yourself and others, however, might change the course of your life. Those of us who work in this space find ourselves being more gentle with those around us, less frustrated by the foibles of humanity, more filled with admiration and affection for those who are doing their best. This becomes a virtuous cycle. Our stance opens us to new possibilities in other people. As we do this, it leads other people to become bigger in our company and they become aware of those possibilities themselves. Spending time with people who are being their biggest selves is a delight that pulls us to be at our most complex. Adult development theories exist to give us a glimpse into what sense the world makes to us and to others in the present and to show us all a path to a different set of possibilities for the future.

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NOTES

1. Robert Kegan, *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 17).
2. Two caveats. First of all, while every form of mind sounds like a complete description, most of our lives are spent in the spaces in between each of these minds—on our way to the next place. In fact, we can measure four distinct stages along the continuum of each of the numbered forms of mind (which adds a level of complexity we won't even begin to get to). Secondly, this system actually begins at birth with babies and toddlers at a kind of baby form of mind, which has its own way of constructing the world.
3. Philosopher and theorist Ken Wilber writes extensively about the “transcend-and-include” phenomenon as a key developmental movement.
4. Robert Kegan, *The evolving self: Problem and process in human development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 96).
5. In our small village, there isn't a lot of disagreement about what the rules are and where they come from. In a more diverse society, however, a citizen with this form of mind could easily be a “model” parent and employee or a “model” gang member or a “model” white supremacist; he would be “following the rules” of his particular society, even if that society was very different from the mainstream of the community or nation.