

situations. The integration of social therapy with other fields, such as medicine, body work, self-help, and spirituality is addressed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 returns to core issues, this time from a more philosophical and political perspective. The book concludes with comments from therapists and therapists-in-training who participate in Newman's training and supervisory sessions addressing how they make use of the teachings in their practices.

Designed for psychotherapists, clinical psychologists, counseling psychologists, social workers, and others involved in the mental health and human development fields as practitioners, supervisors/trainers, scholars/researchers, or students/trainees, *Psychological Investigations* is an invitation to anyone interested in ways to create activistic, socially oriented, culturally based practices of living.

Lois Holzman and Rafael Mendez

PART ONE

Setting the Stage

RAFAEL MENDEZ

The Town Hall theater in New York City's Broadway theater district is full to capacity. In a few minutes the evening's program will begin; already preparations are being made to close the entrance doors. I'm concerned that some of the hundreds of people I've invited will arrive just 5 minutes late and miss the opportunity to hear Dr. Fred Newman's annual psychology lecture. There is a buzz in the theater. Most everyone is noticing the uniqueness of the crowd; the diversity of the audience is captivating. Of the 1,500 people in attendance, there are those one would expect to be attending a psychology lecture—helping professionals, psychologists, physicians, counselors, social workers, and psychiatrists. But this is not the American Psychological Association. What makes this event unusual is the mix of people—many hundreds of New Yorkers, young and old, from many different neighborhoods, and all ethnicities and walks of life. This is a community event.

For nearly 30 years, Newman has spoken to community audiences on advanced topics of psychology and philosophy. He has long believed that it is the ordinary people of the world who need to have and practice the most advanced concepts, so that they can change everything. Each year, the audience grows, as more and more people become involved with and/or are impacted by the psychological, educational, and cultural projects that practice his method of reinitiating human growth. Activists, participants, financial contributors, supporters, and students in these projects have invited their friends and coworkers to the lecture so that they can be introduced to an approach to human development and experience Fred's unique way of teaching.

I am one of the organizers of this evening's event. I'm a college professor, a community organizer, and a therapist. I invited everyone I know to attend. As I walk around the theater, in most every section a group of my students wave and say hello. More than 250 of my students are in the audience. Finally, I spot who I'm especially looking for, Watts. A former student of mine, Watts now works as

a drug counselor in a residential facility in Harlem where he was once a resident himself. Watts is interested in learning how to use psychology to help his neighbors and community. He reminds me of me when I was younger. Fascinated by the approach I presented in class, he asked to learn more. I invited him to participate in the committee that organized tonight's event. Watts has a talent for organizing. I want to meet the people he brought to the lecture.

As he introduces me to the busload of residents and counselors he brought, I feel proud of his success and development. He has organized an often-abandoned grouping of people to hear the lecture with the intriguing title *Changing Everything: An Introduction to Social Therapy*. Like so many others, Watts loved the title and thought his coworkers and clients would be intrigued to learn how to do just that. Watts introduces me to his contingent. They're feeling welcomed.

As I take a few steps further there's a large group of students from my Bronx Community College Group Dynamics class. They are standing and waving as if they were at Yankee Stadium. They're excited tonight. As a class, they have been performing on stage learning a new methodology and psychology called social therapy from me and from Fred Newman's books. Tonight, they get the opportunity to hear from the author of their textbook directly.

Fred Newman founded social therapy in the mid-1970s as a nonepistemological therapeutic approach. More than a decade earlier, he had left the machine shops of the Bronx to study philosophy at City College of New York and then earn his doctorate in the philosophy of science from Stanford University. He didn't remain in academia long. Over the past 30 years, as a teacher, therapist, political activist, theater artist, and author, Fred has brought many diverse and unlikely people together to build something new, a *development community*. He has written numerous books and articles, for both popular and academic audiences, describing how the community works and what it has learned about growth and development. His plays attract growing audiences to the Castillo Theatre in New York City that he built as a performance laboratory. He inspired the creation of a youth leadership training program, the Development School for Youth, which introduces public high school youth to corporations and Corporate America to them. He is the founder and co-executive director of the All Stars Talent Show Network, the largest antiviolence, prodevelopment youth program in the country. He is an extraordinary therapist and leads weekly group therapy sessions, workshops, and classes.

In developing social therapy, Fred has been influenced by the writings of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. In 3 decades of therapeutic work, Fred has blended Wittgenstein's understanding of language and his concept of language games with Vygotsky's concept of zones of proximal development and his tool-and-result methodology to create an approach to helping people learn to perform their lives differently and creatively. Social therapy helps people to create who they want to be. Critical to this therapeutic approach is what Newman calls "philosophizing with a small p." He believes that philosophizing is not about learning what the great philosophers

said; rather, it's doing philosophizing in our everyday life. Philosophizing is an activity that allows us to experience our lives not only in the immediacy of society's here and now, but at the same time as part of the continuum of human history. This, Fred maintains, is a critical human activity. In the absence of philosophizing, it's exceedingly difficult for us to see ourselves in the juncture where history and society meet. Philosophizing about ordinary matters of life is how Fred believes people can learn to think critically and to discover how to continuously create our lives. I have had the good fortune to be one of Fred's collaborators, and as a member of the development community I've participated in creating many community organizations and projects based on the practice of social therapy. I've seen firsthand the enormous personal growth that comes with participating in the activity of philosophizing. And I've found a way to bring this activity into the urban community college classroom.

I first met Fred Newman in 1978. I was earning my doctorate in clinical-community psychology at Boston University. A friend introduced me to Newman's efforts to build a new kind of therapy center called the Institute for Social Therapy and Research. I was captivated by how it was organized. The Institute worked intimately with, and simultaneously supported, the New York City Unemployed and Welfare Council, a union of welfare recipients. This was precisely the type of community-oriented activist psychology I wanted to practice.

Some years earlier, in 1972, I was like Watts. I wanted to do something to help my community, but did not know how. Politicized yet still politically naïve, I had just returned home to the South Bronx from the Vietnam War, where I was an air traffic controller. I served in the Mekong Delta, 100 miles south of Saigon, in a lawless area where the contradictions of the war were stark. I returned home to yet another war zone. The South Bronx was on fire. During the 1970s, there were more fires in the South Bronx than in any city in the world. The plight of my community has since been well documented; the epidemic of arson for profit by landlords devastated the South Bronx, giving it all the appearances of a war zone. People lived in fear that their apartment building would be the next to burn. The devastation left few people untouched; in retrospect, what was most destroyed was the existence of community.

Returning from Vietnam, I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do. I had brief jobs as a roofer and a security guard before landing a job through the Teamsters Union loading and driving a truck delivering cigarettes and candy to local stores. The Watergate scandal, President Nixon, the Vietnam War, and the future of the country were on many people's minds, including mine. I was moved by these social and historical events to want to be a more active participant in shaping what was happening in my community and country, with virtually no idea how to do that. I was an alienated, working-class Puerto Rican, restless and angry. Ignoring the advice of my friends and family, who reminded me that I barely graduated high school with a general diploma, I quit my job and enrolled at Bronx Community College.

It was at Bronx Community College and later at City College of New York that I first learned of psychology. I became fascinated with the idea not only that people could be damaged by life experiences but that they could also be helped to repair the damage. Naïvely, I had always thought people were how they were, and that was how they would always be. I was especially attracted to the community mental health movement and its goal of a mental health center in every community to respond to social concerns and help people in need. I took every psychology class I could, including fieldwork at Jacobi Hospital and Bronx State Hospital, where I worked with the so-called mentally ill. A professor who admired my passion gave me a lead on a job as a community advocate and counselor with elderly people who were destitute and alone. I loved the job and the older people I cared for. It seemed to me that through psychology, I had a job that mattered and a way to make a difference. It also seemed like a cool professional job, a lot better than delivering cigarettes.

But I also was not entirely happy with psychology as I found it. I thought it could be advanced in ways that made it more sensitive to the significance of social conditions and less oriented to the individual in isolation. With the experience of the war still fresh, I was arrogant enough to think I could use psychology and the community mental health movement to do something about the devastation of the South Bronx. I remember finding older people near death in their apartments and bringing them to the hospital where they received the finest of care, only to be returned to the same wretched conditions that made them ill. I thought there must be a way of combining the science of clinical psychology with the advocacy of community organizing.

Imagine my shock when I was accepted to Boston University's clinical-community doctoral program in psychology in 1977. Even though I had graduated with honors from City College and was awarded a scholarship, I was totally intimidated by the idea that I belonged in graduate school. I thought that I would be immediately discovered as a fraud. Instead, it wasn't long before I was the one who discovered fraud. The community mental health movement had died long before I learned about it in school. Community was now a mere footnote to psychology's obsession with the self. I was completing my doctoral work when I first met Fred Newman. He gave me an opportunity of a lifetime—and I took it.

Fred and I are alike and different. Fred is Jewish and I am Puerto Rican. He came of age in the 1940s and 1950s, I in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet we both grew up poor and working class in the South Bronx. We both left home for the first time during an American war, he going to Korea and me to Vietnam. We both went to City College as war veterans. Fred also worked odd jobs; when he was young, he sold programs at Yankee Stadium and delivered groceries. He worked with his older brother as a machinist, a tool and die maker. (He often speaks about this experience of making the special kinds of tools that tool and die makers do. He has brought to psychology and community organizing what every machinist

knows—that new kinds of tools must be designed to create results; the tool and its result are part of the same process.)

When he returned from the Korean War, Fred had no desire to be a machinist. He says (only half-jokingly) that he wanted to do something as distant from the work of a machinist as possible, something that had no practicality—and studying philosophy seemed to fit the bill. Following graduate school and after a few years teaching philosophy, Fred—politicized by the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Vietnam War movement and frustrated by the hypocrisy he found at the university—left academia to do community organizing. It was as a community and political activist and radical therapist that he discovered that the abstract conceptions of philosophy were indeed very practical. And I, initially attracted to psychology because it was practical (I thought it would help me help my community), have been fortunate to be a beneficiary of Fred's discoveries about the practicality of abstract philosophical concepts.

It was in 1979, shortly before I was to begin my clinical fellowship in psychology at Harvard Medical School, Children's Hospital in Boston, that I was invited to attend a staff meeting of the New York Institute for Social Therapy and Research, the therapy and research and training center Fred and a handful of colleagues had just founded. Fred and Lois Holzman were leading a discussion of their manuscript, *The Practice of Method*. I had this extraordinary experience of not having any idea what they were talking about while simultaneously recognizing that it was groundbreaking and revolutionary. I told Fred that an Institute for Social Therapy was needed in Boston, and he invited me to build one. While completing my clinical training, I organized a study group of young professionals to read and discuss *The Practice of Method*. We opened the Boston Institute for Social Therapy a year later. I was its first director, saw patients, and trained new social therapists.

The Boston Institute continues today, but in 1984 Fred invited me to return to New York City. He reminded me that there were more Puerto Ricans in the Bronx than there were people in Boston, and that is where I was needed. At that time, the Bronx was known for its political corruption. Both its borough president and Democratic Party leader were convicted of racketeering in 1979. Fred thought I could make a difference if I entered the political arena. So, doctorate in hand, I began doing community organizing and independent electoral politics. As a community organizer, I participated in developing a broad network of independent educational, cultural, and mental health organizations that practiced Fred's methodological approach.

My electoral political work in the Bronx was part of a larger effort to create an independent electoral political movement in New York and the rest of the country. Long before Ross Perot, Fred understood that creating political alternatives meant creating a social environment where people could break out of the constraints of the two-party political system. Odd as it sounds, at the time many registered voters

believed that if they were registered as a Democrat, they had to vote Democratic. People thought it was illegal to vote otherwise. We set out to create an independent political movement to create the conditions for people to see electoral politics differently.

In 1988 my colleague Dr. Lenora Fulani (also a CUNY graduate, with a doctorate in developmental psychology) ran for President of the United States as an independent. Although she was on the ballot in all 50 states and earned federal matching funds, few people heard of her campaign. When she introduced herself as running for President, people would ask, "President of what?" It was incomprehensible that an African American woman could run for President, much less as an independent. Nevertheless, her independent campaign paved the way for Ross Perot's independent campaign 4 years later and created an environment in which independents could make inroads at the local level.

With Fred as my campaign manager, I ran for many elected positions against some of the most corrupt and entrenched New York City politicians. Most baffling to many observers and supporters alike was that I didn't run for positions that I could possibly win. I ran against politicians who would otherwise have gone unchallenged. For example, in 1989, I ran for City Council President, New York City's second highest office, against a millionaire with a multi-million-dollar budget. I spent a mere \$6,000 and garnered 25% of the vote (over 210,000 votes), winning the South and Central Bronx and almost every Latino district.

I began teaching as a graduate student and continued teaching as an adjunct professor at the College of New Rochelle in the South Bronx and at Bronx Community College during the time I was involved in electoral politics and running for office. At first, I taught because it was fun to be with students. I loved their ambition and enthusiasm. I was a teacher who understood a lot about psychology, its value and limitations. I was a public figure and knew something about how the world worked, so my students seemed eager to learn from me. But I wasn't skilled as a teacher. Most students will tell you that there is a difference between a good teacher and someone who has expertise and knowledge. I taught through the strength of my personality. When I became a full-time instructor, I began to examine my pedagogy. I began to focus my teaching toward supporting students to learn *how* to learn and to recognize that learning to learn could and should be fun.

For the past 8 years I have been an assistant professor (I earned tenure in 1998) in the department of social sciences at Bronx Community College, my alma mater. It is quite a privilege to teach on the same campus where I was once a student. I experience an affinity with my students, since I was once where they are now. Quite a lot has changed within the City University of New York (CUNY), of which it is a part. In 1972 when I enrolled, there was a policy of open admissions and free tuition. It is doubtful I could have entered or afforded college without such policies. Today, increasing tuition (the university hasn't been free since 1977) and admission standards threaten to deny many poor and working-class students of color an educational opportunity. CUNY, like so many other colleges and

universities, has responded to conservative political pressure and is instituting placement exams. Thousands of high school graduates accepted to CUNY are failing the placement tests and thus begin their college work with a cycle of remedial classes that too often fail to prepare them to pass their placement exams. Last year, only 27% of the 6,770 students who took remedial instruction were able to pass the placement exams.

I am struck by the lack of creativity that characterizes the "back to basics" approach at our college campuses today. It seems sadly ironic that as we have entered the 21st century our educational system is implementing policies that revert back to the teaching methods of the 1950s. Creativity is virtually absent from the fossilized environment of our schools, and I believe its absence is related to the difficulty our students are having with learning. Given this crisis in education, many students are underdeveloped.

Rather than promoting creativity and critical thinking, our schools focus on acquisitional learning. In the information age, education has come to mean the acquisition of propositional knowledge, for example, "I know this, I know that." Learning in the college environment often looks like this: The contemporary college student exits the classroom, reaches for her or his laptop computer, goes online to one of the many websites such as ASK.com or Screwschool.com, and finds prewritten essays on any and every topic. Students are then ready and able to find immediate answers for their professors on what they are supposed to *know*. They are becoming skilled at the knowing game.

Students learn where to find the "right answer" and accumulate information, but rarely learn how to think and create. The primary activity they are required to do is to recall information (terms, definitions, facts) that has been identified by the professor as "what will be on the test." Whether in the form of a multiple-choice test or an essay, the students are rarely asked to think, but to repeat what they have been told is important. This is what passes for learning at most colleges.

I believe the pedagogical response is not to go back to basics, but to reinstate development—having students go beyond themselves. It's a methodology I learned from Fred and it's very different from remediation. One of the most valuable things I've learned from Fred is the practice of challenging traditional assumptions about learning (and involving my students in this activity). In my classes, I work to support my students in creating new learning environments (what Lev Vygotsky, as I learned from Fred and from Lois Holzman, called zones of proximal development) in which learning is the activity of doing what you do not know how to do. When people are asked to create something, they are placed in a position of having to reorganize what they know to produce something new. What they produce is a product of their activity, not what was predetermined by their professor as what they should remember. The activity of being creative is process oriented, involving helping people step out of how they typically view things, to break out of categories and see things anew. Creative activity, as opposed to acquisitional learning, promotes human development. It is the creative activity of

you not being you. It is taking you and stretching you, as you go beyond your self and your identity. This dialectical process of you being you and not you simultaneously is the developmental process of becoming. Creative activity includes internalizing and making use of the examples of others, but it is not being exactly like them. Rather, it is using models in the social process of actually creating something new, what Newman and Holzman (again, after Vygotsky) call creative imitation.

The course I teach, called Group Dynamics, is unlike traditional college courses; there is no defined curriculum, no list of key terms to know, and no right answers. When I was first assigned this class I surveyed the traditional psychology textbooks. I noticed that their definition of group was fundamentally different from Fred's. The traditional psychological understanding is that a group is a collection of individuals with a common purpose or a common context. Through my early experience with Fred training as a social therapist and providing supervision to those training in social therapy, I learned a different concept of a group—an entity distinct from the individual members who constitute the group.

When Fred trains therapists to practice social therapy, a critical focus is on developing the therapist's skill in seeing and relating to the group rather than to the individuals who comprise the group. A social therapist would ask, "How is the group doing?" or "What does the group want to do?" The philosophical belief in the existence of the group as an entity is fundamental to social therapy, where the therapist treats the group, not any individual member. This understanding of group challenges traditional psychology, and it also challenged me to think more radically about the way I wanted to teach my Group Dynamics course.

I decided to use Fred's popular books, *Let's Develop! A Guide to Continuous Personal Growth and Performance of a Lifetime: A Practical-Philosophical Guide to the Joyous Life* as textbooks for the course. To advance my own skills at being creative, I enrolled in a personal development course at Performance of a Lifetime, an improvisational program inspired by Fred's social therapeutic approach aimed at the development of adult creativity. There I learned improvisational activities that engage people in the activity of *performance*, the self-conscious activity of producing how we are in the world. Using this cultural-performatory approach supports people in breaking out of their predetermined social roles that often impede our development through the internalization and identification with prescribed roles ("Oh no, I couldn't do that; that's not me!"). Adapting this approach to my Group Dynamics course allowed me and my students to break out of our roles as professor and student and create a new learning environment, one where I could aim to teach the class (the group) rather than the individuals and together we could focus on the group's development.

At first I used an ordinary classroom and had my students reorganize the chairs to create a stage area so they could perform improvisational activities and skits based on their reading of *Let's Develop* and *Performance of a Lifetime*. The roars of laughter so disturbed other classes that I had to seek a different location. I chose an auditorium, which turned out to be ideal. The odd setting makes it clear

from the beginning that this is no ordinary class. The students perform their activities on stage, in front of a live audience.

Through Fred's books, I have introduced my students to the significance of philosophizing and performing. For example, after my students read "Giving in a Culture of Getting" (a chapter from *Let's Develop*), I ask them to improvisationally create a skit with two different endings. Creating different possibilities out of similar circumstances gives them the opportunity to engage in the philosophical activity of considering questions like, when do we decide to be giving? Who do we give to? Why do we give? Is there a developmental value to giving?

By philosophizing I mean being self-conscious of the ordinary day-to-day activity of making mundane decisions in our lives. Through the activity of philosophizing students learn to think critically. I ask them questions to explore the assumptions of how we think. I'm seeking to create a conversation without assuming that either they or I *know* anything.

At times, they are assigned to create cultural productions for the college campus. Last semester, for example, they produced a forum on therapeutic conversations. They invited a guest speaker and organized students to attend the event. At the forum, the students performed skits about the experiences that they had visiting physicians and counselors, and having the experts not listen to them as they gave their professional advice. The humor of the skits not only made clear the significance of the forum's theme, but simultaneously created an environment where the guest speaker could lead an open and lively dialogue.

By creating, producing, and performing cultural events daily in class and occasionally for the college campus, the students are engaged in a primarily collective activity, rather than a primarily individualistic one, and thereby are building a community among themselves. Performers work to make their on-stage partners look good, a fundamentally *giving* activity that challenges the competitive character of most learning environments. Students say that what we do is in stark contrast to their other classes where they rarely meet their fellow classmates and are tacitly discouraged from sharing knowledge so that each person can look good compared to others. In these ways, my teaching raises philosophical questions for them that challenge their notions of schoolwork and learning.

My students are confused—often from the first day to the final class—but they are creative, creating, alive, and performing. Indeed, their confusion and experience of not knowing is a condition for development. This is what Fred means by nonepistemological. They have to engage the traditional notions of the "self" and the associated therapeutic conceptions, "know yourself" and "identity." Students get introduced to Ludwig Wittgenstein's understanding of private language, and engage the question of creating meaning rather than just using language. They play with the intellectual history of concepts such as identity, self, and other, and how these concepts impact on their daily lives.

These discoveries regarding performance, development, and community underlie the unique structure of my classes. Students build learning environments

that promote their learning and development collectively, as a class. I have found this methodological approach to be a significant response to the crisis in education and the failure of psychology to respond to the myriad social issues that people are facing. It supports students in creating new social environments where they can perform and create culture—new ways of seeing and being. My fellow professors have asked me how I could possibly teach without a curriculum. I respond by saying, “How could students create if the class is already predetermined?” It’s been my experience that the creativity my students produce always exceeds my expectations.

I am particularly enthusiastic about this current effort, *Psychological Investigations*, because it presents Fred as the extraordinary teacher that he is. I have seen how Fred’s books have influenced my students far beyond the classroom. So many of them, after taking my class, ask, “What else has Fred written that I could read?” This book is for them as much as it is for those interested in training as therapists or those considering advanced training.

All of which brings us back to Town Hall. What will Fred say about how to change everything? Like most everyone in the theater, I am at the edge of my seat, barely containing my anticipation. Fred is a great orator and master storyteller. He never fails to be provocative, intriguing, profound, and yet quite ordinary. From his opening remarks, his distinct methodological understanding is evident. He thanks everyone for coming to the event and then, with his characteristic charm, pokes fun at the title of his lecture while simultaneously revealing his understanding of what it means to change everything. He says, “There is a paradox of giving a talk entitled ‘changing everything.’ That is, that giving talks changes nothing. It is not me who is going to change anything. It’s you, and the thousands of people like you, who have the capacity to change everything. So if you came to hear an inspirational talk, you came to the wrong place. You are the inspiration, not me.”

In the following days the students in my Group Dynamics class are alive with questions. “I loved the event, but I thought it was supposed to be a psychology lecture. Why did he talk so much about paradoxes?” “Wow, it was very interesting, but what was he talking about? What is a . . . I’m not sure how to pronounce it . . . paradigm?” “I loved the crowd. I’ve never been to anything like that. I liked how everybody was together. I liked the part about community, and that we need to have community.” “I felt like I understood what he was saying, and that he was saying something important, even though I can’t say what it is that he said.” The lecture was a wonderful opportunity for my students to experience the larger development community that they are participating in building.

I told my students that what I thought was so special about the audience at the Town Hall theater was that it was filled with ordinary people from all walks of life, like them, sharing this experience and having their many different responses to it. I tell them that Fred does not believe that paradigm shifts occur as a result of a new paradigm being introduced to society from high on up, such as a scientific institution or government. Rather, he believes that paradigm shifts are the product

of social-cultural transformations produced by the masses of society and that this takes years if not decades to produce. He does not make a distinction between the activity of transforming paradigms and the cultural activity of creating new environments and activities and building community. I remind my students that Fred is continuously attempting to organize new cultural activities of people seeing in new ways by creating community together.

As a community organizer, I helped Fred build an independent political party to help people see that they can create new conceptions of democracy and democratic participation, allowing for new coalitions among people who otherwise might not come together—building community. As a professor, I support students to create a new learning environment that is not predetermined, where they can philosophize, play with abstractions, perform and create culture, and build a community where they are free not to know, where they are free to creatively learn and develop.

I see how lucky I am, at this time in history, to find my job as an educator fulfilling. I am fortunate to introduce to you, as I do my students, some of the teachings of Dr. Fred Newman. The abstractions contained within them are of very practical value to my students in the Bronx and, I believe, to ordinary people the world over.