Theory in the Context of Collaborative Inquiry

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Abstract. Collaborative practices that bring researchers and community participants together are favored by a social constructionist meta-theory. Specific features of research activity in the human sciences are discussed relevant to the contributions of theory to collaborative practice. It is argued that collaborative practice consists of alternating movements between two modes of action. In the first mode, the present, the past and the future of a local field are grasped and problem-solving is initiated. In this mode, action is largely based on tacit forms of understanding. In the second mode, the tacit assumptions are recognized in the past tense and thus become explicit. In the first mode, a theory helps facilitate the movement by deepening the understanding of a field and developing a policy or a plan. In the second mode, a theory can logically express the tacit assumptions, relocate recognition and practice in the previous or first mode, and reveal useful new directions for action in a newly emerging first mode. It is further argued that collaborative practice in a local field can be linked with action in other local fields, thus giving rise to inter-local practices. Theoretical abstractions can be used to translate concrete activities in such a way that activities in spatially and temporally removed situations are illuminated. Key Words: action, collaborative practice, tacit assumptions, theory

The Social Constructionist Perspective

My orientation to the place of theory in working with collaborative, action-oriented research must be understood against the backdrop of my engagement with social constructionist theory. As I will hope to show in this opening section, as the features of constructionism are incorporated into the human sciences, so is our orientation to research significantly altered, along with the way in which we may view the function of theory. After exploring implications of social constructionism for human science research, I will describe one of our endeavors and the place of theory within this activity. There are five constructionist arguments that are of particular concern to our collaborative work.
The Two Modes of Inquiry

At the outset, I believe social constructionism is optimally viewed as a meta-theory. In this sense, it stands in opposition to traditional meta-theory in psychology, which is largely dominated by the remnants of logical positivism. While both constructionism and positivism share certain features as meta-theories, there are crucial differences. In terms of similarities, a research stance based on social constructionism functions in the same way as logical positivism in what can be called a first mode of inquiry. In the first mode, a phenomenon of concern is grasped as an object of investigation and is addressed as an object of practice. For the positivist, the phenomenon might be any of the current objects of psychological investigation (e.g. cognition, emotion, aggression), while the constructionist might focus, for example, on discourse, oppression or power. In each case a world of particulars is made intelligible. Research within an accepted construction of reality represents a first mode of inquiry.

Yet there is a second mode of inquiry that follows from a constructionist orientation but not from positivism. Here the researcher moves into a zone of intelligibility in which the world that has been objectified in the first mode is understood as an artifact of a particular interpretive community or tradition. In effect, the objectified world of the first mode is contextualized both historically and culturally. For the positivist, this second form of intelligibility would function as a challenge if not a refutation of assertions made within the first mode. It would suggest incompleteness, error or fiction. For the constructionist this is not the case. A move into the second mode of intelligibility does not undo the objectivity of the first mode, but enables us to appreciate the socio-historical and political context in which such research products and practices are generated, and to consider their function within the broader dialogues of society. It also opens new spaces of possible action.

Beyond Determinism

It is also important for my work to abandon the kind of determinism characteristic of logical empiricism in general and psychology in particular. If reflection in the second mode of inquiry can generate new and unanticipated alternatives to action, then the assumption that psychology is the search for determining influences on behavior is counterproductive. Such a psychology assumes the continued repetition of the past. We believe it is more useful to understand communities as capable of collective transformation. Of course, social constructionism is often misconstrued as a kind of social determinism in itself. It appears to suggest that any action or state of consciousness is determined by a large-scale collectivity (often viewed as a society or culture). It is true that large-scale collectivities are of concern to many social constructionists. However, such research should not be viewed
as a commitment to social determinism. As many constructionists will argue, people are not determined by their relationships; they are active participants within them. In this sense, the constructionist may be concerned with a wide range of diverse relationships, from small to large and from short-term to long-term. The focus may be directed to a small and fleeting collectivity or to the non-verbal communication between a mother and her child. However, any action and its object are located as a node within various relational or collective streams. The actors are participants in these streams, not their products.

The Social Context of Material Reality

It is important to establish clarity on the matter of material reality. Social constructionism is often misconstrued as totally ignoring physical or material reality. This misunderstanding is partly attributed to the social constructionist’s view that every reality is socially constructed. Such a view emphasizes the epistemological concerns of social constructionism, but the emphasis here is exclusively epistemological as opposed to ontological. When exposed to constructionist ideas, it is natural to ask such questions as, ‘Is it possible for a newborn baby to run a hundred meters in ten seconds, and that the moon is now crashing into the earth?’ Such questions are, however, misconceived. That something takes place is never denied (or asserted) by social constructionism. The important point is that once you describe any physical conditions verbally, the description is a product of a social tradition, or in other words, the outcome of participation in a collective stream. Thus, in our work, we participate in the everyday realities of those with whom we collaborate. However, we also understand that these realities are culturally and historically situated. Thus, we view them as open to reflection and change.

Beyond Dualism

We ordinarily speak of the human being as an individual body that is separated from the outside by a skin and is equipped with a mind somewhere within the skin. In this picture, a mind is an important place where, for example, hot and cool information-processing, judging, thinking and decision-making take place. However, a constructionist sensitivity reminds us that the mind-in-a-body paradigm is not naturally developed from our naïve everyday experiences. Rather, it is a social product issuing from a particular life-historical process. A Japanese philosopher, Wataru Hiromatsu (1982, 1993), has demonstrated how a mind-in-a-body paradigm is phenomenally constructed. Coulter (1979) has pointed out how the paradigm is sustained through the use of everyday language. Osawa (1990) proposed a sociological theory of the body that persuasively demonstrated how the
paradigm was developed in life history as well as in social history, especially from the pre-modern to modern phase. As a concrete illustration, Yanabu (1982) proposed that Japanese people did not have a notion of an individual person importantly positioned for making private judgments and decisions until the beginnings of modernization about one hundred years ago.

From a constructionist perspective, the inner-/outer-world paradigm, another side of a single coin of the mind-in-a-body paradigm, can be suspended. It is not essential to collaborative research, and in certain respects may be counterproductive. More useful in terms of societal issues of importance are the social processes by which we construct our world. In our own work, we have found it especially useful to posit what might be viewed as a 'collective stream and physical constraint paradigm'. From this standpoint, we recognize that because of physical constraints not all actions are possible. However, any reference to the constraints issues from the collective stream. Thus, all constraints are open to reconstruction, with alternative movements of the stream thus made possible

The Significance of Personalized Discourse

Having distinguished an outer world from an inner world, the natural sciences have set out to discover features of the latter, while eliminating the subjective influences of the former. In this sense, the natural sciences also share the inner-/outer-world paradigm, even if their exclusive focus is on what they consider the outer world. In the natural sciences, the two worlds are distinguished from each other and then a fact of an outer world, an objective fact, is investigated while influences of an inner world, subjective influence, are eliminated. A major exception is psychology, a field that investigates an inner world in a natural science modality.

The natural sciences have one more important characteristic besides their investigation of an outer world. It is an intense and persistent effort to impersonalize our understanding through the development of theory. A personal discourse is one whose meaning and validity are affected by those who engage within the discursive practices (Noe, 2003). Thus, for example, whether we count someone as truly a friend, as trustworthy, as highly motivated, and so on, depends importantly on the unfolding conversation with this individual. In contrast, an impersonal discourse is one whose meaning and validity are not affected by the subject of the discourse. The natural sciences might well be viewed as a relentless movement to impersonalize a discourse. In this light, the discipline of psychology strives to develop a discourse that cannot be affected by conversations with those who are studied.

When a discourse of the outer world reaches a point where it becomes purely impersonalized, it is a discourse considered valid for everyone, beyond any temporal and spatial limitations. Such a universal discourse is
not merely a discourse but represents what is typically called ‘an objective fact’, that is, a fact that is accepted by everyone. Here the natural sciences continue to remain close to the hopes of early positivists that scientific theory should ultimately be converted to an abstract logical system such as mathematics, and should be an exact representation of reality.

This pursuit of impersonalized discourses of an outer world is closely related to an iron-bound rule of methodology. In the natural sciences, a clear line is drawn between a research object (the object of observation) and the researcher or observer; metaphorically the object of research is placed on the opposite side of the line to the investigator. The methodological rule is that the researcher is forbidden to cross the line and change the object in the direction he/she wishes (a form of personalization). Of course, a measurement apparatus is often mounted for purposes of observing the object on the other side of the line. However, research efforts would be ruined if the observing apparatus altered the nature of the object.

Yet, from a constructionist perspective, such a natural science orientation is problematically applied to work with human beings. If meaning is created within discourse, drawing a line between researcher and those under observation will mean a split between discursive communities. Those under observation will never be understood on their own terms, which is to say that from the public standpoint the human sciences would be a failed enterprise, systematically misunderstanding those under study. In my view, interaction between a researcher and those in whom he or she is interested is often integral to the success of the venture. Importantly, the ‘facts’ that result from such interaction will be the product of joint construction. In this case, the ‘fact’ takes the form of personal discourse in which a subject of the discourse participates in creating its meaning and validity. I view this joint participation as essential for a human science (Sugiman, 2000).

In summary, there is much within a social constructionist perspective that favors a human science in which researchers join with the outside community, participating in the flow in such a way that new forms of life may spring into being. In this activity, we move beyond deterministic models, beyond the exclusive focus on individual minds, and beyond materialist reductionism, and work with discourses personalized and powerful in their potentials. Such collaborative activity does not abandon traditional empiricist research, but, rather, folds it into the constructed realities prevailing at any given time.

The Depopulation Problem: A Collaborative Approach

Having clarified the ground of our work, we can proceed to a concrete case. This particular case involves a movement in which a small group of individuals, in collaboration with a group of researchers (of which I have
been a member), have been trying for more than twenty years to revitalize a depopulated rural community. In this description, I will treat theory in the broadest sense of the term, ranging from the analysis of a particular problem to both ‘grand theory’ and meta-theory. In addition, a theory of method and data analysis may be included.

Looking back to the time when I was a child in the 1950s, Japanese society was struggling with the damage of defeat in the Second World War and was still filled with poverty. I remember that some of my classmates in elementary school could not afford to pay for their school lunch. At officially sanctioned sites, poor people queued for hours to sell their blood in order to survive. Who could imagine, at that time, that we Japanese would live in such a rich society as we do only two or three decades later?

The Japanese economy began to grow rapidly in the late 1950s and 1960s. The growth was so rapid that the gross national product (GNP) doubled during the period from 1960 to 1967. By the mid-1970s, Japanese society had become a so-called ‘affluent society’, a term defined by the political economist J.K. Galbraith (1958) as a society in which issues of food and shelter are no longer a major concern. Among several major factors that contributed to such rapid growth, the concentration of young laborers in major industrial areas is clearly important. Many people, especially young people, left their home villages in rural areas, moving to large cities in industrial areas to seek job opportunities. The rapid shift of massive populations caused overpopulation in large cities, while rural areas suffered from depopulation. Because of depopulation, the human resources necessary to maintain community infrastructure deteriorated in many rural areas. Such a phenomenon was referred to as the ka-so (depopulation) problem.

In the 1960s, the major problems of the rural areas were economic. The national government’s policy for the ka-so problem focused on providing rural depopulated areas (ka-so areas) with financial support to satisfy their minimum needs for social infrastructure. Eventually, however, the economic boom experienced in the urban areas began to spill out into the rural areas. Yet, interestingly enough, young people in rural areas didn’t stop leaving their home villages. Depopulation continued.

A major reason for the continued exodus was no doubt the general conservativeness and exclusiveness traditionally maintained in rural areas. People in rural communities tended to be hesitant to introduce anything new or innovative into their life, preferring instead to maintain their traditional ways. They were also wary of accepting people who came from outside into their small communities. In addition, in many mountainous areas, a very limited number of people owning huge areas of land dominated almost all the important decision-making in a community. Many young people could not bear to live in such communities and therefore left their home villages. Thus, the nature of the ka-so problem changed drastically from an
economic problem in the 1960s to a socio-psychological problem in the 1970s and later.

In the 1980s, some residents began to challenge the prevailing conservativeness and exclusiveness of their rural communities, which they sought to revitalize so that something new and good could be achieved. The types of challenges were diverse. Some communities tried to discover natural resources that could be used to attract tourists. Others focused on artistic activities through which residents themselves could share new enjoyment with each other and sometimes with artists working in large cities. Some communities tried to develop new products by combining their own traditional manufacturing skills with new technologies.

The Chizu Revitalization Project

It is in this historical context that our own collaborative work began. Since 1984 my colleagues and I have been engaged in a revitalization movement in Chizu Town, in the Tottori Prefecture of Japan. Chizu is a typical ka-so area surrounded by mountains. The population, which was more than 15,000 in 1960, had dwindled to 9,600 by 2004. The area is 225 square kilometers.

My colleagues and I have not only observed the revitalization movement but have also collaborated with those individuals most responsible for the movement. It is not an exaggeration to say that one of the major characteristics of the movement is that it has been a collaborative practice in which both the people of Chizu and the research team have participated. The revitalization movement in Chizu has a more than twenty-year history. This history can be divided into two parts, first from 1984 to 1994, and then from 1994 to the present. The first part, the beginning of the revitalization movement, can be further divided into two stages.

(1) In the first stage (1984–9), three projects were initiated and the Chizu Creative Project Team was established. Two people who have consistently taken leadership since they met in 1984 triggered the revitalization movement. Their personalities were nicely complementary, with one possessing an excellent ability in planning and an aggressive attitude toward implementation, while the older was a broad-minded person on whom many people liked to rely. They shared with each other a strong motivation not only to revitalize their home village, but also to adopt a broader view in which their home village could become less isolated and more fully linked with developments in the culture more generally. Together with some thirty colleagues, they created the Chizu Creative Project Team, or CCPT. The CCPT began to find ways to utilize the omnipresent cedar trees so that they acquired new value. The mountains in Chizu are covered by many cedar trees which were forested for a hundred years. These trees were a major
economic resource until the early 1960s but then fell victim to cheaper lumber from abroad.

The CCPT implemented three consecutive projects. First, it developed various woodcrafts by using small pieces of lumber obtained in the thinning of cedar trees. Such lumber scraps had never been utilized efficiently until then. Second, the CCPT held a competition in which architects from all over Japan submitted designs for housing that could take advantage of the cedar trees. A new brand, Chizu Cedar, was born by virtue of the great success of the competition. Third, the CCPT developed the know-how for constructing cedar log houses and thereby constructed a small village of houses in a mountainous recreation area. Soon after the construction, the area began to attract many visitors who wished to enjoy their holidays in this beautiful place.

By developing new cedar products and creating an attractive vacation spot, the CCPT challenged the conservativeness and exclusiveness of the rural culture. The recreation area also attracted many visitors and thus provided residents in Chizu with opportunities to communicate with outsiders. Such communication also helped to transform the area and bring it into closer contact with the nation at large.

(2) During the second phase (1989–94), the CCPT matured. Its activities gained strength and sophistication through intensive interaction with outsiders. Such interaction further contributed to breaking down the exclusiveness that had been dominant in Chizu. Among the outsiders were non-Japanese people and Japanese professionals. In the former case, the CCPT started an exchange program in which non-Japanese college students from a nearby university were brought in to play with Chizu children. The CCPT also started a program in which both local students and residents could visit foreign countries. Among the professional visitors invited to Chizu were a regional planning consultant and university professors. I myself visited Chizu for the first time and began to be interested in the movement in 1992.

Part two of the revitalization movement began in 1994, with infiltration into the local Chizu town government. During the first ten years, 1984–94, the CCPT achieved a number of impressive results. Many people began to feel a sense of respect for the CCPT, to the extent that it became difficult, even for the Chizu local government, to refuse its proposals for town improvement. The CCPT’s policies and ideas began to infiltrate decision-making in the local government and produced two new social systems, the Sunflower System and the Zero-to-One Movement.

In the first case, members of the CCPT worked together with the local government and the post office to create a service in which postal workers would assist elderly and incapacitated people living alone. For instance, a postal worker would visit an elderly person, who might ask him or her to do things like complete some paperwork at the town office, buy something at a
cooperative store, pick up medicine at a hospital, and so on. The elderly people would put a yellow flag on their mailbox when they needed such services. After the postal worker completed a postal delivery for the day and returned to the central post office, he or she would go to the town office, the cooperative store and the hospital on behalf of the elderly person, and would bring the items to that person the following day.

The name, the Sunflower System, came from both the expectation that a postal worker’s service would be appreciated by the elderly person with a smile like a sunflower, and the image of a postal worker going around on a predetermined course every day like a sunflower making a 360-degree rotation as it followed the sun. From its inception, the Sunflower System attracted much attention from various parties across the country, not only in post offices, but also in social welfare and local government offices. The Japanese Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications encouraged post offices in rural mountainous areas to introduce the system into their towns or villages. It was later reported by the ministry that the system was being implemented in more than 250 areas.

The Zero-to-One Movement was a second project triggered by the infusion of the CCPT’s spirit into the local government. The movement was intended to introduce participatory democracy into the smaller units of the community, consisting of between fifteen and fifty households. These small units will simply be referred to as villages in the remainder of this paper. Traditionally, major decision-making in many villages had been dominated by a limited number of wealthy persons. Each household was represented at a village meeting by only one member (excluding women and children), usually the house owner, and every villager was obliged to commit to the implementation process once a decision was made. The Zero-to-One Movement intended to replace this traditional form of decision-making by fostering a type of participatory democracy in which anyone who wanted to participate could do so, regardless of gender and age. Such an attempt was quite new not only in Chizu but also in many rural areas in Japan. It represented a leap from absence or non-participation to recognition as a full participant in governance.

To start the Zero-to-One Movement, all residents in a village were required to consent to their involvement. Also, they were required to establish a council to which representative members would be elected by a general assembly of the village. The movement was dedicated to three major goals: (1) active management of the village by residents; (2) self-governance by residents; and (3) exchange/communication with the outside. Following these guidelines, villagers were involved in a ten-year movement in which they developed both long-term and short-term plans to improve their own village and collaborated with each other to implement them. The town government recognized the council as a formal representative body of villagers. The office provided each council with modest financial support.
Technical support by experts in regional planning was made available by the town office upon villagers’ request. In the period from its inception to 2004, sixteen among a total of eighty-nine villages in Chizu became involved in the movement.

Having scanned the development of this revitalization project, what is now to be said about the function of theory? Given my earlier remarks concerning social constructionism and collaborative inquiry, there are three ways in which theoretical work proves significant in these endeavors.

**First Mode Research: Evaluating the Zero-to-One Movement**

Earlier I distinguished between two modes of inquiry. In this first mode of collaborative practice, researchers share the tacit assumptions of people in the field. Collaborative practice without any tacit assumptions would be impossible. At this stage, detailed observation and data collection are sometimes very useful. In this stage it is possible to establish an object of research, and to employ statistical analyses.

In this context my colleagues and I carried out a questionnaire survey to see how the movement had been changing since it was started in 1996 (Kawahara & Sugiman, 2002). The survey was administered to all villagers involved in the movement and to a number of others, randomly chosen from those who were not involved. The intent of this survey was to investigate how much the movement was accepted by villagers, how much it had infiltrated into their beliefs, and to what extent it had become part of the overall decision-making process in a village.

As this study suggested, villagers who were involved in the movement could be classified into four groups in terms of their attitude toward decision-making. The first cluster was indifferent to any kind of decision-making. They had little concern not only with the new way of decision-making as represented in the Zero-to-One Movement, but also with traditional decision-making. The second cluster was concerned with decision-making but was negative about the Zero-to-One Movement. The third cluster was concerned with decision-making but was neutral about the movement. The fourth cluster was concerned with decision-making and was positive about the movement.

Interestingly, we found that the fourth cluster, consisting of those who were concerned with decision-making and positive toward the movement, differed from those in the other clusters. Specifically, they supported both the traditional and the new ways of making decisions; however, they distinguished between the contexts in which the two approaches were appropriate. For example, the traditional, top-down way of decision-making was used for a problem that might affect the ownership of land or might lead to a financial burden on each household. The new way of decision-making was used to create a future design of the village, or develop a new product.
by utilizing natural resources that had been overlooked. In contrast, in the villages where the second and third clusters were dominant, it was likely that the Zero-to-One Movement was treated only as a sub-system of the traditional governance system, in which a limited number of wealthy persons controlled almost all decision-making. In the villages where the first cluster was dominant, it was observed that a small number of people were trying hard to promote the Zero-to-One Movement, but their efforts had not yet infiltrated into the majority of residents. Furthermore, it was found that villagers in the fourth cluster tended to feel more comfortable in their lives and were more willing to continue living in their village than those in the other clusters.

In effect, by using abstract theoretical categories linked to the shared realities, we were able to generate data useful for evaluating the impact of revitalization. We were provided with a means of rendering support to the movement and sensitizing participants to its differing effects.

Second Mode Research: Reflexive Enrichment

Collaborative practice in the first mode necessarily stands on a set of specific and largely tacit assumptions. In a second mode of collaborative practice, arising from a constructionist view, the tacit assumptions of the preceding period are recognized and thus become explicit. Here one inquires into what has thus far been taken for granted. In effect, inquiry into tacit assumptions becomes an essential part of collaborative practice. This process begins to expand the spectrum of understanding and the range of possibly useful actions. In exploring the array of existing assumptions, a new domain of tacit assumptions is set in motion.

To illustrate, the problem of depopulation in Japan is called ka-so, as mentioned above. The term might be translated into English as 'excessively sparse'. Our research activities in the first mode were essentially based on the assumption that Chizu was moving toward an excessively sparse level of population. But then events occurred that enabled us to move to the second level of inquiry. Soon after I became involved in the movement, one of my colleagues, Professor Norio Okada, brought to our attention a figure that showed the change of population in Chizu over the last 150 years, effectively since the period of the late feudal age in Japan (Okada, Sugiman, Hiratsuka, & Kawahara, 2000). According to it, the population in the feudal age was consistently around 7,000, and this level was maintained until the end of the Second World War. Immediately after the war, the population jumped to the level of 15,000, mainly because many people who had lived in urban areas had to return to their home town for food, and because of the return of soldiers to their homes of origin.

As we deliberated, we began to see that the present population, approximately 9,000, did not deserve the term ka-so, and that a downward trend was
not necessarily bad. The level with which we had compared the current level was attained by a rare historical occurrence, that is, the termination of the war. From this perspective, we were essentially observing a return to a population level that the town had enjoyed from the feudal age until the end of the war. Thus, we created a new term, *teki-so*, which can be translated as ‘adequately sparse’. The creation of the term was a movement in the second mode of inquiry. As a result of this conceptual shift, our race to halt the evil of *ka-so* was totally replaced with a challenge to create a new style of life for *teki-so*.

We now entered a new reality, effectively a new first mode in which the past, the present and the future are grasped in a different way from the previous first mode. In addition, the collaborative practice in which we engaged in the previous first mode was given new and different meanings. In the longer term, we may view collaborative practice in the human sciences as the successive alternation of the two modes. In the first mode, theory is required to help grasp the past, the present and the future, and develop a policy and a plan for practice. In the second mode, a theory can logically express tacit assumptions in the previous first mode, relocate recognition and practice, and reveal possible new directions. At this point, new realities are generated and first mode inquiry is again invited.

**Theory and the Expansion of Collaborative Practice**

I have argued thus far that theoretical work contributes to collaborative endeavors in two different phases of inquiry. Yet there is a third function of theory that demands attention. A theory is essentially a set of discourses, and in this sense the same as our accounts of qualitative and quantitative data, that is, observation language (Gergen, 1994a, 1994b). The two kinds of discourse, theoretical and observational, differ from each other in their level of abstraction, with the former more abstract than the latter. One might say that theoretical and observational languages exist in a compensatory relation with each other. A theoretical language obtains applicability to a specific field through the help of the observation language (through illustration, instantiation, concretization). However, the more abstract language enables the concrete discourse to spring from its local environments. Theory thus permits inter-local expandability.

The languages shared by participants in a collaborative practice can provide a vivid recollection of their activities in a particular place and a particular period of time. However, this local language cannot easily be connected to other collaborative practices in other times and places. The local discourse may seem unique to a particular group of people. Here abstraction from the locally vivid record becomes useful. In other words, as the original record is abstracted, it gains potential relevance to people who were not involved in the initial practice.
Two examples of this inter-local expansion of practice will illustrate the possibilities. First, my colleagues and I have been active in providing publicly available accounts of the good work in Chizu. The Zero-to-One movement attracts a good deal of public attention, especially among people who are interested in the revitalization of depopulated rural areas. The town office is busy meeting with groups visiting Chizu from all over Japan. To facilitate inter-local expansion, my research colleagues and I published a booklet (Okada et al., 2000). In this booklet, we used not only the language of local description, but also an abstract language that would enable people to appreciate the possibilities for broad implementation of practices. Ten thousand copies of the booklet were sold in only three days after its publication. Copies were also published in braille. We trust that our publication contributed to the expansion from the local to the inter-local level of the movement.

A second example illustrates the possibility of developing theoretical conceptions that simultaneously enrich local practice and lend themselves to inter-local expansion. During the course of our work in Chizu we developed a theoretical explanation in terms of a theory of unilateral transfer of social norms (Osawa, 1990). In brief, we can view a social norm as a set of implicit rules, or an invisible horizon, that defines a world of valid or legitimate action. The transfer of social norms from one party or group to another is quite different from an exchange relationship. In an exchange relationship, there is a common understanding of the commodities to be exchanged and their value. In this sense, the exchange, equal or unequal, is carried out within a same world surrounded by a single horizon. In contrast, the transfer of a social norm is the transfer of an invisible horizon. Here, neither the party who presents the norm nor the party who receives it has a sense of exchange, of giving and receiving in the ordinary sense. Instead, the former party simply provides the social norm regardless of whether the latter party shows any interest in adopting it. At the same time, the latter may take it up without any appreciation for the former. The transfer of a social norm is a combination of unilateral giving by one party and unilateral receiving by the other, which occurs without a necessary sense of appreciation in either direction.

This line of theorizing was first developed for consideration by CCPT members. It was hoped that the conceptions might assist them in two ways. First, it would help to explain how their philosophy and practices had influenced the town government, and the Zero-to-One Movement had become integrated into many villages. Moreover, it would provide an explanation for the vexing question of why the CCPT, and its two leaders, were scarcely appreciated by either the town office or the villages involved in the Zero-to-One movement. When these ideas were presented, they sparked an enthusiastic discussion that continued for over three hours. The concept of the unilateral transfer of a social norm became familiar among CCPT
members, providing important support for what might otherwise seem a thankless effort.

At the same time, this theoretical account of the impact of the Zero-to-One movement contributed to the expansion of the movement from the local to the inter-local level. The theory played a special role in the public account of CCPT activities (Sugiman, 2000). The concept could be used widely to understand various challenges in many different communities. In effect, the theoretical work both enhanced local practice and was offered as a benefit to workers in many different locales.

**In Conclusion**

The role of theory in the human sciences has been discussed in this paper by focusing on collaborative practice in which researchers are engaged in a community revitalization process. Here the focus was placed first on the function of theory in enriching the potentials of the practice from within, and then on the uses of theory in expanding the potentials of the practice to the society more generally. Yet this is not the only context in which theory is required. Besides researchers who are directly involved in collaborative practice, those who develop theories enabling us to take long-term historical perspectives and/or to see our activities in a broader cultural context are needed. Even armchair speculation can make a contribution to the field. However, in my view, an armchair theorist in the human sciences should have in mind the possibilities of benefiting human practices, both within the culture and within the profession as they contribute to the culture. Let us think of theory not as a revelation of truth, but as a discourse through which we may create better worlds together.

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