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Social Construction on Parade



By Diana Whitney

Over the years many of you have joined us in Taos, New Mexico for conferences, workshops and dialogues, and have experienced the special creative spirit that infuses life in Taos and gave birth to the Taos Institute. It has been four years since I moved from Taos to Chapel Hill, NC and still the richness of Taos lingers.

I have met, however, an equally enchanting creative muse in North Carolina. Last Saturday was the “Hand Made Parade” in the town of Hillsborough, NC. It was a celebration of community at its best and a vibrant example of social construction in action. Imagine stilt walkers in purple and orange twirling costumes, a twenty foot long brightly painted snake carried by fourth graders, their teachers and parents, and baby strollers decorated as pea pods and pumpkins mingling with African drummers, a string band and best of all a brass band of musicians who waited decades to strut their stuff. When they were in high school, the troupe of black musicians was not permitted to march. Now they march every year, role models of positive aging, and reminders that together we can create a more just and joyful world.

The purpose of the “Hand Made Parade” is to foster community involvement in the arts through participation in every aspect from costume making to performance. It is an exemplary case of appreciative leadership: “the relational capacity to mobilize creative potential and turn it into positive power – to set in motion positive ripples of confidence, energy, enthusiasm and performance – to make a positive difference in the world.” (*Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, Rader, 2010*). Everyone is welcome to join the parade and to attend public workshops to make their own costumes, masks and giant puppets. Groups are urged to create their own Handmade Parade ensemble. School classes, sports team, business and church groups work with a theme and participate in the parade as a group. “The rules are simple: no written words, logos or motorized vehicles (except wheelchairs). Entries should not advertise a particular religious or political belief. All parade participants are required to be in costume.” (http://www.hillsboroughartscouncil.org/handmade_parade.html).

It was a day of relational capacity in full bloom. Children transformed into butterflies, fish and turtles strolled alongside town leaders, local and visiting artists, educators, business and religious leaders wearing giant costumes and dancing as giraffes, trees and goddesses. After the parade, the mayor was called to speak. We all waited, swaying together to the beat of African drums, as a man wearing overalls and a huge paper mache head, carrying a large broom and working busily as a street sweeper, slowly stepped forward. He is the change we want to see – leadership that joins with people to create a world that works for all.

Consider yourself invited to next year’s Hand Made Parade. I look forward to seeing you in North Carolina or elsewhere and continuing the creative dialogues and movements started almost 20 years ago in Taos, New Mexico.