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Chapter 12

Practicing A Pedagogy Of Hope: Practitioner Profiles as Tools for Grounding and Guiding Collective Reflection in Adult, Community, and Youth Development Education

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Hope, as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice.
-Paulo Freire (1992, p. 9)

Introduction

In his book on adult civic education, David Boggs (1991) writes that adult education agencies 'have no higher purpose than to promote the attitudes and skills necessary for participation and involvement in a democratic society and to augment the learning that accrues when these behaviors occur' (p. 12). And yet, in Boggs' view, adult education agencies have routinely avoided this purpose, 'preferring instead the placid environment of academic subject matter, certificates, and diplomas' (p. 6). In so doing, such agencies have 'relegated themselves to the sidelines and become peripheral observers to the task of establishing a democratic civic culture' (p. 6). Boggs calls for adult educators and their associations to get off the sidelines and become actively engaged in civic life.

A similar call appears in the most recent edition of the *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*. In his essay in the *Handbook*, B. Allan Quigley (2000) writes with great concern about the apparent erosion of the 'social action' focus that was once central to the mission and tradition of adult education. After outlining his views on why and how this focus has been eroded, he pleads with members of his field to 'commit to what we can do to build a better democracy for all . . .' (p. 220). '[A]dult educators should be engaged in the informing—the very envisioning—of a better society,' he argues, 'to help build a better future through a more active engagement in the democratic systems our founders helped create' (p. 210).

¹ After the first author, the authors are listed alphabetically as a way of equally acknowledging their contributions.

One of the questions Boggs and Quigley invite us to consider is *how* a social action focus might be renewed in adult education, if it has indeed been eroded. How might educators be encouraged to think imaginatively, hopefully, and critically about the ways in which such a focus might be put into practice? And how might they change the culture and politics of their organizations to centralize a social action oriented practice?

As university-based researchers working in the fields of adult, community, and youth development education, we are struggling to find answers to these questions, questions that are germane not only to our own fields, but to all the social sciences – and indeed, to the academy as a whole. In our work, we are trying to create organized opportunities for collective reflection and collaborative learning and action that will help educators, and the organizations they work for, gain a better - and more critical - understanding of their potential roles and normative responsibilities in the on-going project of democracy and the educational practices that can bring such roles to life.

Our conviction that adult, community, and youth development educators and their organizations have important roles to play in the project of democracy is not, as Boggs and Quigley remind us, a new idea. Neither is it a new idea to think that such roles occasionally need to be recovered and revitalized. As John Dewey (1993, p. 122) proclaimed nearly a century ago, 'Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.' While there are strong antidemocratic forces at play today in the United States, there are also good reasons to believe that democracy can be reborn through 'a growing movement for civic renewal' (Sirianni and Friedland 2001). If education is to be the 'midwife' of this rebirth, as Dewey suggests, the question of the democratic mission and work of educational practitioners and their organizations must be raised and examined.

In recent years, an energetic discussion about the social and political roles of adult educators and their organizations has emerged in the academic literature in adult and continuing education. For Arthur Wilson and Elizabeth Hayes (2000), the key to developing such roles is 'critically reflective practice.' Broadly speaking, critically reflective practice points to a kind of practice that is explicitly attentive to questions of power and interests at individual, interpersonal, organizational, structural, and cultural levels. Critically reflective practitioners learn to ask themselves questions such as 'What for?' and 'Who benefits?' as a way of focusing their attention on the dynamics of power and interests in their organizations and their practice (Cervero, Wilson, and Associates 2001).

As the term itself suggests, critically reflective practice is grounded in the process of critical reflection. According to Stephen Brookfield, critical reflection must be a 'collaborative project,' because at bottom it is an 'irreducibly social process' (2000b, p. 146). In Brookfield's (2000a; 2000b) view, there are two 'distinct purposes' of critical reflection: first, to uncover submerged power dynamics and relationships, and second, to uncover 'hegemonic assumptions,' which Brookfield defines as those assumptions that 'we believe represent commonsense wisdom and that we accept as being in our own best interests without realizing that these same assumptions actually work against us in the long term by serving the interests of those opposed to us' (2000b, pp. 137-138).

While this view of critical reflection offers some promise, Brookfield himself acknowledges that people who pursue it run the danger of succumbing to an 'energy-sapping, radical pessimism,' leaving themselves feeling puny, alone, vulnerable and demoralized in the face of structural power that seems overwhelming and unchangeable (2000b, p. 145). In acknowledging this danger, Brookfield puts forth an important, yet 'unresolved' question: how can we 'remain critical and yet optimistic while practicing a pedagogy of hope' (2000b, p. 145)? His question poses an unavoidable challenge to all who wish to organize critical, collective reflection with a goal toward social action.

In this chapter, we want to speak to that challenge by drawing on our experience in organizing and facilitating two projects that are engaging adult, community, and youth development educators working in a large, complex organization in New York State—Cornell Cooperative Extension—in collective reflection. Our projects were created as invitations for educators to reflect together on the civic dimensions of their work. The projects were grounded in our personal goal of inspiring action toward renewing the social action tradition in Cooperative Extension's adult, community, and youth development education. Central to each of the projects was the creation of 'practitioner profiles' – first person accounts of educators' practice stories edited from the transcripts of tape-recorded interviews – that were used as a key tool for grounding and guiding the collective reflection processes we organized. We will return to a discussion of these profiles in the next section. However, understanding the choices we made as we organized forums for collective reflection requires understanding the stance from which we operate. We turn to that first.

Our Stance

The stance from which we organized our collective reflection projects includes several interconnected elements. First, our choice of who we invited to join us reflected our embrace of one of the key organizing principles that American civil rights leader Ella Baker promoted: find, learn from, and support those who are already working.² In both of our projects, we looked for educators who we had reason to believe were, at some level, 'already working' out of a social action tradition.

Second, when we organized our projects we viewed and presented ourselves as much as learners as teachers. We began with some general knowledge of educators' programs and activities, but little specific knowledge of their interests and ideals, the nature and shape of their

² Ella Baker was one of the most important leaders in the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. For discussions of her work, see Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), and Mary Field Belenky, Lynne A. Bond, and Jacqueline S. Weinstock, *A Tradition That Has No Name: Nurturing the Development of People, Families, and Communities* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

educational practices, and how their work could be seen as having civic dimensions that might be linked to a 'social action' tradition. Given our limited knowledge, it would have been both arrogant and counterproductive for us to show up as the 'academic experts' from Cornell University and challenge people to examine their foundational assumptions and practices without taking the time to carefully understand and appreciate the value of what they already knew. As a result, our initial approach was not to teach them how to understand and pursue a social action focus in their work, based on our own preconceived notion of what such work should look like, but to draw out accounts of their own experiences, practices and thoughts, and invite them to reflect with each other, and with us, on questions of civic meaning, significance, and potential.

Third, we knew that we would need to engage our educator partners in ways that would include posing and responding to challenging questions that might help them (and us) see how their civic work could be strengthened. But we did not begin this work with a well-defined, prescribed theoretical framework for critical reflection. Instead, the three of us had varying (and not necessarily clearly articulated) conceptions about what counted as critical reflection, how to facilitate it, and what its exact purposes were. However, we did share the belief that, more than anything else, relationship building is foundational to (and must precede) the work of fostering critical reflection, and that relationships of trust and respect take time to build.

Fourth, we began our projects with a conviction—not explicitly articulated at the time but intuitively felt nonetheless—that it would be important for us to take a *non-idealistic* stance that is close to Fay's (1987) conception of a 'non-idealistic' critical social science. Such a stance rejects 'unilinear' constructions of the relationship between individuals' ideas and behaviors and social structures, and instead embraces a dialectical view: social structures influence and shape individual beliefs and behaviors, but in turn, people can influence and change social structures. An idealistic approach to collective reflection would have led us to be naively optimistic, believing that our collaborating educators' ideas about who they are and what they are doing are the sole shaping force of their practice and behavior, and therefore, all we needed to do is to create a space for reflection that would enable them to clarify, refine, or change their ideas. Alternately, a predominantly structuralist stance would have led us to be pessimistic or even fatalistic, believing that little or nothing could be done through collective reflection that would be of any use in influencing the overwhelming power of social structures in shaping people's ideas and behaviors. By taking a non-idealistic stance, we hoped to work from the dialectical tension between 'the human person as a maker of history and as one made by history' (Freire, 1998, p.115) so as to attend to the potential power and importance of both.

Finally, acutely conscious of a desire to 'remain critical and yet optimistic,' we intentionally organized our projects to focus our own—and our participants'—attention first and foremost on the *hopeful* civic or democratic possibilities embedded in their practice, rather than on shortcomings or problems. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) have noted, the one 'who asks first 'what is good here?' is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the sources of failure.' They continue:

The relentless scrutiny of failure has many unfortunate and distorting results. First, we begin to get a view of our social world that magnifies what is wrong and neglects evidence of promise and potential. Second, this focus on failure can often lead to a kind of cynicism and inaction. If things are really this bad and there is no hope for change, then why try to do anything about it? Third, the documentation of pathology often bleeds into a blaming of the victim. Rather than a complicated analysis of the coexistence of strengths and vulnerabilities (usually evident in any person, institution, or society), the locus of blame tends to rest on the shoulders of those most victimized and least powerful in defining their identity or shaping their fate. Fourth, the focus on pathology seems to encourage facile inquiry. It is, after all, much easier to identify a disease and count its victims than it is to characterize and document health (pp. 8-9).

Our stance reflected the conviction that while anyone seeking to promote more democratic educational practices must remain critically mindful of the barriers (structural, cultural, historical, etc.) that stand in the way of realizing these possibilities, change is more apt to occur when we help magnify 'promise and potential' rather than pathology and failure. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire advocates for a similar stance when he suggests that people need *critical hope* as a motivating and sustaining force for realizing deeply felt ideals and aims:

I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings, and become a distortion of that ontological need. When it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes us, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will re-create the world. I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative. I do not mean that, because I am hopeful, I attribute to this hope of mine the power to transform reality all by itself, so that I set out for the fray without taking account of concrete, material data, declaring, 'My hope is enough!' No, my hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water. (Freire 1992, p. 8)

Freire's metaphor is an apt one for us. In the academic world we inhabit, we feel as though we have been swimming in waters polluted by the 'radical pessimism' Brookfield speaks of. We long for ways out of those waters. We long to practice a pedagogy of hope, and we long to do it

face-to-face, through collective reflection processes with educators who see themselves as having joined, as we have, the 'fierce struggle that will recreate the world.'

We turn now to a discussion of our projects, which we see as early experiments in putting a pedagogy of hope into practice. In telling the stories of these experiments, both of which remain unfinished, we focus on the difficulties and partial successes of organizing collective reflection processes that are infused with a sense of critical hope.

The Projects

Background

The two projects we discuss in this chapter were organized in partnership with educators working for Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE). CCE is part of the U.S. Cooperative Extension System, one of the largest organizations in our fields of adult, community, and youth development education. Created by federal legislation in 1914, the system links county-based educators and citizens to faculty, staff, and students from 105 land-grant colleges and universities across the United States. Cornell University is New York State's land-grant institution, and CCE is the university's formal extension education system, a large, statewide organization with a budget of over \$120 million that comes from federal, state, and county partners and a variety of grants and contracts. It employs more than 400 adult, community, and youth development educators in fifty-seven county-based associations, plus New York City. These educators have working relationships with thousands of citizens and organizations across the state and hundreds of faculty, staff, and students based at the Cornell University campus in Ithaca, New York.³

CCE's mission statement is broadly cast around education for personal and public good: 'The Cornell Cooperative Extension educational system enables people to improve their lives and communities through partnerships that put experience and research knowledge to work.' Work in CCE is officially organized around five themes: Agriculture and Food Systems Sustainability; Children, Youth, and Families; Community and Economic Vitality; Environment and Natural Resources; and Nutrition, Health, and Safety.

Before we began our projects, there were few formal, on-going opportunities for CCE educators to engage in collective reflection on the specific question of the organization's *civic* mission and work. By 'civic,' we mean those aspects of mission and practice that have to do with community development, leadership development, public deliberation and problem solving, and capacity building in the skills needed for active citizenship. Whether or not CCE has a civic mission, and if so, what it looks like in practice, are not easy to discern from a distance.

On the face of things, CCE, like the larger national extension system of which it is a part, has defined itself as a provider of 'technical assistance' through the transfer, dissemination, and/or application of 'objective,' scientific, research-based knowledge to an array of technical and

³ Statistics are drawn from CCE's website: <http://www.cce.cornell.edu/>.

practical problems. There is little hint of anything connected with 'democracy' or 'social action' in this construction. But based on our previous experience with the organization, and also on Scott's historical research into Cooperative Extension's civic mission (Peters, 1998; 2002), we believed that CCE's bland face hid a conflicted organizational culture and practice that was partly technocratic in orientation, aiming toward social engineering on behalf of state and corporate interests, and partly democratic, aiming toward civic development on behalf of local community interests. The dominance, in the last half-century, of the technocratic tradition has been shaped by powerful political and economic forces and actors that have tried to mold universities' activities, including their extension activities, to a particular set of values and interests. These include prioritizing national economic growth, 'competitiveness' and private corporate agendas, without serious regard to the consequences to individuals, families and communities, and the supremacy of a positivist, professionalized, expert-dominated system of knowledge production. But we believed that strands of another, more democratic, culture and practice remained. Our projects were developed as invitations for educators to engage in collective reflection that would uncover and explore this mostly hidden and unnamed democratic orientation, and the civic dimensions of practice that embody it, as a step toward strengthening them and contributing to a larger effort to change institutional practices and priorities.

The first project we will discuss engaged a group of graduate students from Cornell University in collective reflection with a group of educators working for Cornell University Cooperative Extension of New York City (CUCE-NYC). The project aimed to create a space for collective reflection that would allow participants to probe beyond surface descriptions of CUCE-NYC's work to get at its civic value, meaning and significance, and its connection to the challenge of building community-university partnerships. The second project sought to create a space for a group of youth development educators working for CCE in a variety of locations throughout New York State to collectively reflect on whether and how their use of the arts as a tool for youth development has existing or potential civic dimensions that contribute to community development

We approached our projects as action researchers. Action research is a 'new paradigm' (Lincoln and Guba, 2000) approach to research that seeks to simultaneously create valid social knowledge and contribute to processes of democratic social change by including local stakeholders as co-researchers, weaving together 'local' and 'professional' perspectives to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a community, testing and validating knowledge through iterative cycles of reflection and action, increasing people's capacities to act on their own behalf to improve their lives, and seeking to create a more just, more democratic world (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Wadsworth, 1998; Kemmis and McTaggart 2000). Our own agenda as we organized these projects was to catalyze a particular kind of organizational change. We were interested not only in creating a space where we could uncover and understand the potential civic dimensions of

educators' work through collective reflection, but in using what we learned together to establish a long-term commitment to make such work a more central part of the institution's mission.

Both projects presented us with the same broad puzzle: how to organize and facilitate collective reflection that produces trustworthy knowledge and useful theory about the civic dimensions of practice in extension education, while also inspiring critical hope and action for strengthening that civic practice. Our search for methods to do this led us to experiment with an adaptation of 'practitioner profiles,' a research tool developed by John Forester, a professor in Cornell's Department of City and Regional Planning. Practitioner profiles are first-person accounts of 'practice stories' edited from the transcripts of tape-recorded interviews. Forester developed the profile approach as a tool for his own research, allowing him 'to take practice more seriously, to recognize sensitively and to analyze powerfully what insightful practitioners do well in the most challenging moments of their work' and in doing so, to illuminate 'theory ... through the lived experiences of [practitioners]' (Forester 1999).

To develop profiles to use as tools to support and inform our collective reflection, we conducted tape-recorded interviews with individual educators, each of which lasted from 60-90 minutes, covering three different parts. In each interview, we first asked educators to talk a little about their background, including how and why they came to work with CCE. Second, we asked them to tell a specific practice story about a particular project or set of related work experiences that they had found instructive for their own development, and that they felt would help others understand their work. Third, we asked them to reflect on the significance or meaning of their practice stories, and what lessons they learned from them that they think are important. While we created a written guide with suggestions for specific questions to be asked under each of the three parts of the interview, the interviews were conducted more as structured but naturally flowing conversations. The profiles we constructed from the transcripts of these interviews are not brief paraphrased summaries, 'thumbnail' sketches, or bullet-pointed lists. Rather, they are relatively long documents (anywhere from a dozen to thirty typed, double-spaced pages) that capture specific practice stories in the conversational voice of the practitioners themselves.⁴

We chose to develop and use profiles as tools for grounding and guiding the collective reflection processes we organized because we believe that stories are an excellent tool for helping people learn and that people's lived experience is an excellent starting point for reflection. Stories about those experiences, in their specific particularity, do something that a summary, job description, bulleted list of themes or competencies, and abstracted theory can never do. Profiles are complex and nuanced. They allow readers to learn not just what people say (usually in vague generalizations) *about* their work, but to draw an even richer picture from people's tales of what they actually *do*. They contain the mix of insight, ambivalence, frustration, and hope that most experienced practitioners, in any field, bring to their work. They draw attention to the values, skills, strategies, and roles that educators employ everyday.

⁴ Many of the profiles from the CUCE-NYC project (along with a fuller explanation of the profile development process) have been collected in Peters and Hittleman (2003). They are also available on the web at: [<http://www.publicissueseducation.net/ab.htm#B>].

We sensed that extension educators had powerful stories to tell and were eager to tell them. We were eager to capture them. We took a leap of faith that the profiles would work as grounding and guiding tools, as none of us had ever tried to base collective reflection around profiles before. But we believed that they might help practitioners reflect on their practice in way that would generate the 'critical hope' we sought.

In the remainder of this section, we will discuss each of the two projects in greater detail, highlighting some of the successes and failures of our first attempts to organize collective reflection in this way. In the final section, we will turn to a discussion of what we have learned.

*Project I: Naming the Work of Extension Education (by Margo and Scott)*⁵

We begin the story of the first project on a summer afternoon several years back, in the courtyard of a large public housing project in the Bronx, a small fenced garden off to one side. On the fence was a sign naming the gardening project, followed by the words, 'Technical assistance provided by Cornell University Cooperative Extension-NYC.' Scott, who had been invited to New York City to learn about CUCE-NYC's work, had spent the day driving with Gretchen Ferez, Environmental Revitalization and Management issues area leader, through Bronx neighborhoods, visiting community projects in which CUCE-NYC had been involved: a thrift shop, a recycling center, a teen hydroponics program, community gardens. He had heard story after story about the extension educators' connections with community organizations, a web of relationships built and nurtured over many years.

Struck by the stark contrast between the flat, rather uninspiring description on the sign in front of him and the rich, human-centered stories that had infused the day, Scott turned to Gretchen with a question: "Does that sign – 'providing technical assistance' – capture what you really do?"

Her answer surprised him. "Pretty much," she responded.

Already concerned that little serious research existed that helped people understand extension *practice*, particularly the civic dimensions of that practice, Scott decided to offer an experimental course that would bring together Cornell graduate students and CUCE-NYC extension educators to both study and critically reflect on that work. The course, 'Community-University Partnerships in Urban Extension Work,' had several agendas: to provide an opportunity for extension educators to reflect on, and thus, enhance, their work outside of the hectic pace of the day-to-day delivery of educational programs; to enable graduate students interested in community education and community-university partnerships to learn directly from experienced practitioners by participating in that reflection process; and to contribute to broader, research-based understandings of extension's civic mission and work.

⁵ A substantial portion of this section is drawn from M. Hittleman and S.J. Peters (2003).

The CUCE-NYC educators had told us that they had a hard time explaining what they did. Gretchen put it this way: “My son hasn’t figured out what I do because I haven’t been able to tell him. I’m being honest here. I am seriously looking for help finding concise words in English that says what it is we do. We say our work is rewarding. We say we help people through non-formal education strategies or approaches or something to address critical needs. It just sounds like jargon. . . . No one [else] has a clue because we are not able to articulate what it is we do.”

Thus, these two related questions became the focus of the class—the CUCE-NYC educators’ question: how do we define and name what we do? and our question: how do we create an organized space for reflection that will surface for discussion the richer civic practice we believed was embedded in many extension educators’ work? While we didn’t have a clear roadmap for how to proceed, we did have an agreement about three things. First, using a distance-learning technology called ‘Pictel’ that allowed us to create a live interactive video connection between the campus and New York City, we would hold weekly two-hour reflection and discussion sessions, to be built around an agenda we would construct together. Second, we would augment these long-distance discussions with one or more trips to New York City for a longer, face-to-face interaction. Finally, the students would capture stories from educators’ practice in the form of practitioner profiles as tools for grounding our collective reflection.

We chose to begin our work together with ‘in person’ contact to get to know each other and build our working relationships. Thus, in February 2001, we, along with eleven Cornell graduate students, joined about a dozen CUCE-NYC staff members in New York City. For weeks, we had repeatedly asked ourselves a series of questions with a sense of both anxiety and anticipation: Would this experiment in a collaborative class work? Could we develop a process for collective reflection and learning that would simultaneously meet the needs of university graduate students and community practitioners? What would we learn about the work of extension education, and how? Would this work have any real value to extension educators – on campus or in the field? Would the answer to the question: “Does ‘technical assistance’ capture what you really do?” turn out to be “pretty much” after all?

We would continue to wrestle with these and other questions throughout the semester. But an answer to the last question began to take shape almost immediately.

A few minutes into the introductions, Madie McLean, a community nutrition educator with more than thirty years of cooperative extension experience, stood up to take her turn. After telling us a bit about her life and how she came to work with extension, she launched into a story about a young woman in one of her basic nutrition classes who didn’t know how to cook rice. She recounted how they practiced together – two cups water, one cup rice; two cups water; one cup rice. The following week, the young woman came back to class beaming with a new-found pride and confidence; she had made rice for her family’s dinner. At this point, Madie stopped and looked at us pointedly: “If you want to understand what we do here,” she said, “you have to understand, it’s not about the rice.”

Madie’s story – brief as it was – eventually became a mantra for both the extension educators and for us. ‘It’s not about the rice’ became a shorthand way of pointing to the human and community significance or meaning of extension education, beyond the ‘technical assistance’

educators provide in relation to a specific issue or problem to be solved (e.g., how to cook rice, how to plant and tend a garden, how to parent, how to write a resume and interview for a job, etc.). It provided a powerful metaphor to use as a tool in our collective reflection, reminding us that we needed to probe beyond and beneath surface appearances to uncover the essence of the extension education we were trying to gain a more critical understanding of.

After we returned to campus from New York City, the students in the class set to work developing profiles of a group of educators from each of the four issue areas of CUCE-NYC's work: community and economic development, nutrition and health, workforce development, and environmental revitalization and management. They recorded and transcribed interviews with the educators and edited the conversations into profiles. While the profiles were being developed, we began our teleconferenced weekly reflection sessions with more general discussions of community-university partnerships and introductions to CUCE-NYC's programs. Then we began bringing the first drafts of the profiles in. Each week, we selected two profiles to be read prior to the session, leaving our time together to discuss what we found interesting or troubling about them and what if anything they revealed to us about the essence of CUCE-NYC's work, its civic dimensions, and the question of the shape and nature of community-university partnerships.

As we began to discuss the profiles with the educators, some of the reflection sessions provided glimpses into an educational practice that was richer, in civic and human terms, than the 'technical assistance' label would imply. At the same time, too many of the sessions were superficial and unfocused, leaving us feeling as though we had only skimmed the surface of things. Moreover, a troubling pattern developed where the educators from the city began speaking in what sounded to us like uncritical and unreflective press releases, while the students on the campus sat passively in silence, reluctant to challenge the educators or ask tough questions. Painfully, we began to realize that while we had set out to create a space for generating critical insight into CUCE-NYC's educational practice and hope about its civic possibilities, the pattern of interactions we had fallen into was neither hopeful nor critical.

Through email, Scott asked participants for ideas about why our reflection sessions had become so flat, unproductive, and unsatisfying and what we could do to make them better. The responses pointed to a range of problems. The unfamiliar technology and room setup (e.g., students facing a large screen rather than each other, the time delay in teleconferenced conversations, the awkwardness of seeing one's face projected on a large screen while speaking) had the unanticipated effect of stifling discussion. The shifting participation of the CUCE-NYC educators, contingent on their weekly work commitments and interest levels, made it difficult to create an environment of safety and continuity. Students (and perhaps the extension educators themselves) found it awkward to be critical about a person's work as reflected in a profile when the person was present in the discussion. Cognizant of questions of power and imposition - particularly the tendency of academics to come charging into community settings as 'experts' with 'the answers'—both the students and Scott were pulled to abdicate our own expertise and

knowledge. We also got stuck struggling to figure out how to identify and meet diverse learning needs and interests.

We (Margo and Scott) spent a great deal of time processing these problematic dynamics in phone conversations with Ruth Allen, executive director of CUCE-NYC, and Jackie Davis-Manigaulte, an experienced CUCE-NYC educator helping to coordinate the project. While we came up with several things to try to make our collective reflection sessions more productive and satisfying (for example, leaving time before and after each collective reflection session for each group to process and reflect on their own), our sessions remained challenging and only partially satisfying for the duration of the course.

One of the things we took the initiative to do, however, did make a difference in the quality of our collective reflections: we decided to bring in some carefully chosen theory from a book by Mary Belenky, Lynne Bond, and Jacqueline Weinstock, called *A Tradition That Has No Name: Nurturing the Development of People, Families, and Communities* that we thought might help push our reflection to a deeper level. Belenky and her colleagues studied successful organizations that helped people, particularly people who previously hadn't taken active roles in the life of their community, to exercise leadership and come to have a real say in the way their lives, families and communities are run. Through their research, they identified a tradition they call 'developmental leadership.' We thought this tradition might provide a way of naming CUCE-NYC's 'hard-to-define' practice in civic terms.

We were struck by how the language we heard in the profiles of some of the CUCE-NYC extension educators – language evoking nurturing, growth, caring, family ties, and the creating of community – seemed to echo the tradition of 'developmental leadership' described by Belenky and her colleagues. The excerpt from their book we brought to one of our collective reflection sessions described developmental leaders as being

... intensely interested in the development of each individual, of the group as a whole, and of a more democratic society. These leaders want to know each person, what they care about, and where they are trying to go. They also work to articulate the goals that people in the group have in common. They look for each person's strong points, for the things already in place upon which the people could build. They also look for the strengths in the people's culture as a building foundation for the whole community. They ask good questions and draw out people's thinking. They listen with care. To better understand what they are hearing they try to step into the people's shoes and see the world through their eyes. Then they look for ways to mirror what they have seen, giving people a chance to take a new look at themselves and see the strengths that have not been well recognized or articulated. Because these leaders open themselves so fully to others, we think of them as connected leaders. We also talk about them as midwife leaders because they enable the community to give birth to fledgling ideas and nurture the ideas along until they have become powerful ways of knowing. [T]his tradition puts forth a model of public leadership

dedicated to 'drawing out,' 'raising up' and 'lifting up' people and communities. (Belenky et. al 1997, pp. 14-15, 17).

We asked the CUCE-NYC educators whether they saw themselves in this description. Many of them answered with a resounding “yes.” We then began to ask – both them and ourselves – what would it mean to view the work of the CUCE-NYC educators as part of this tradition of developmental leadership? How might this change our understanding of what extension educators do? How might it change the parts of their work that are seen and valued?

In July, several months after the official end of the academic semester, we organized one final reflection session in the form of a retreat to be held in the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens. Scott and Margo negotiated the content and structure of the retreat through a series of conference calls with Ruth and Jackie. At their request, the retreat was to include all eighty of CUCE-NYC’s staff members, most of whom had had little or no contact with this effort to date. We selected four of the profiles as tools to ground reflection on the essence of CUCE-NYC’s work. Staff members were randomly divided into four break-out groups of about twenty people each and given an hour to discuss one of the profiles (which they had been given and read ahead of time); each of the groups was facilitated by one of the Cornell graduate students. We then reconvened the entire staff to share what they had learned, in a session facilitated by Scott.

“What was it like to hear about the work of your colleagues? Anything strike you?” Scott asked. The discussion quickly turned to the importance of people, rather than programs. It’s “that people thing,” said one educator. “Building communities . . . We grow people in NYC,” said another. “It’s the caring, it’s the passion, it’s the commitment,” said a third. “You can do any program effectively if you have some of the things besides the [content] knowledge that I’ve never, ever heard expressed in a group, which is the nurturing, and the caring, and the flexibility.” A fourth person observed: “You can *never* give people from here [points to her head] what you can give them from here [points to her heart]. You can give all you want from your head, but unless your heart is there, you’ve missed it. And you better not be missing it.”

As the discussion continued, other reflections arose – about what it meant to be part of a community, trying to build that community, and what it meant to be part of Cornell. But the talk returned again and again to people and to caring, to the notion that the essence of their work is not as much about the technical knowledge they deliver as it is about the development and growth of the *people* they work with. One participant observed that this was the first time they had publicly discussed with each other the notion that caring about people, loving people was the essence of their work, although she had privately thought about it that way – and heads nodded around the room.

We have not had the chance to conduct an in-depth follow-up since the retreat, but conversations tell us that this new, formerly private language has now become part of the public discourse within the organization. The nutrition educators have told us that ‘it’s not about the

rice' has become a frequent phrase in their staff meetings and other interactions – both as a shorthand reminder to publicly acknowledge what matters and as a way to communicate organizational values to new staff members and interns. Further, the organization has begun to search for ways to integrate reflection, as an ongoing practice, into their work life. One small reflective group of nutrition educators has met. While, as in most workplaces today, the many, many demands on staff members' time and attention makes any additional commitments difficult, other such venues for reflection are being discussed. And we have been invited to return to New York City some time in the near future, this time with a published collection of the CUCE-NYC educators profiles (Peters and Hittleman 2003), to facilitate further reflective conversations.

Project II: Reflecting on Practice Stories in the Arts and Community Youth Development (by Hiline)

It was through my research assistantship with 4-H Youth Development that I began constructing profiles of extension educators who were using the arts with young people across New York State. And it was as a result of their enthusiasm and wisdom that I decided to bring together a group of educators (5 women and 2 men). Scott, my academic advisor, largely facilitated this initial meeting, which took place in November 2001. Participants were happy to have an opportunity to meet one another and exchange ideas. Most came having read the profile of Bud, the director of an after-school performing arts program for teenagers, and Kathy, who had been instrumental in establishing a multicultural arts project in a rural area that counts numerous migrant farm workers. We spent the day focusing on those two particular profiles; participants were active (some more than others) relating their experience to the story, asking questions, and identifying emerging themes. In spite of the differences in the contexts in which they work, participants were quick to see connections across their experiences. Both Kathy and Bud, for instance, were very interested in issues of diversity. This was reflected in Kathy's tales of her efforts to break the invisibility of migrant farm workers through the arts and Bud's stories about giving young people of colour an opportunity to play roles that they would not normally play.

The people present not only had know-how about the arts as a tool for youth development, they had experienced the value of the arts first hand. Bringing their stories together was a testament to how powerful the arts can be. Some of us felt we had to take this understanding beyond this group and promote this kind of work in Cooperative Extension. Scott, who like myself was delighted about the positive energy, hesitantly proposed that we write a book together. To his surprise, the participants picked up on his suggestion and seemed excited about having their stories told in a book. We discussed his proposal; most seemed to think that a book would be a good opportunity to increase the visibility of their programs and, most importantly, to inspire and point to possibilities for the use of the arts in CCE.⁶

The participants who had already been profiled agreed that their profiles needed to be revised before being included in a book. To some extent, talking publicly about their work and hearing

⁶ At the moment few people use the arts in CCE beyond traditional arts and crafts projects.

each other's stories gave them a new perspective on their own story. For instance, when Bud first told me his story, he ended with:

I've been painting a glowing picture here rather than getting to the grubby part of screaming...at kids who refuse to behave. It's very challenging! Some people have the ability to walk into a room with the authority of a disciplined teacher and the kids freeze and they behave themselves. I don't. I come into a room and chaos breaks loose! And out of the chaos comes the fun of doing, of creating...

When he shared his story and interacted with others about it, he acknowledged publicly that the chaos was an important part of his work and realized that it needed to be part of his story. The creativity that is born out of his sessions with young people comes to life largely because he does not impose a rigid structure on the youth. This often leads to messy situations for which he had not accounted in his initial profile. We agreed that I would re-interview him so he could say more about this. We also decided as a group that we would all get together again and question each other because it was challenging us to think more carefully about this work. I committed to coordinating the book project and started thinking about it as an opportunity for collective reflection.

About a year later, we found ourselves – and a few new faces – at a retreat center in the woods. After sharing a meal, we sat down in the cozy living room of our dorm and went around the circle sharing our expectations. Various participants showed excitement at having this rare opportunity to reflect with others about their work. One interest that was shared by various educators was the question of how to evaluate and advocate for this work. Some were interested in figuring out how to account for this process and justify their work to superiors, colleagues, and especially funders. For my part, I hoped that participants would get recognition for their experiences, but would also feel challenged to think differently about their work. In particular, I was hoping they would see beyond the arts' contribution to personal development to the arts' potential as a tool for collective social change. With that goal in mind, I had come prepared to teach the group about Community Youth Development -an educational approach that presents young people as partners in the development of their communities – as a potential lens through which to look at their work.

As I listen back to the expectations that we shared, it becomes clear to me that our common goal to promote the arts in extension rested not only a passion for the arts, but also on a critical acknowledgement of a need for change in the organizational culture. There were two main criticisms that were voiced in that early stage of the retreat. First, 4-H projects an image that does not appeal to a wide array of youth. Some participants expressed frustration that 4-H is often

associated with agricultural programs (e.g. cows and horse shows) and does not provide the arts with much visibility. One participant pointed out that 4-H has often been criticized for 'making the best better'; this comment resonated with participants who were concerned by the lack of diversity in 4-H. If our book succeeds in enticing more educators to use the arts, perhaps that would attract youth who have previously been unreached and provide them with spaces where they could express themselves, be recognized, and challenged. The second shared criticism was also tied to the organizational culture, as well as to funding mechanisms, which are quite number- and outcomes-oriented. To most of us, the value of youth development work largely lays in the self-confidence, power, and skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, etc.) that are developed in the process of doing projects. The educators are finding these outcomes quite difficult to measure. Furthermore, the obligation to be accountable to funders who expect certain products (e.g. a finished video) by certain deadlines is at odds with the flexibility, openness, and freedom that youth development processes require.

This initial discussion was followed by a brief negotiation about the agenda for the rest of the retreat. I presented my proposed agenda, which in my desire to help participants move beyond their experiences, I had based on the notion of cycling (from practice to reflection to practice and so on). We would start in groups of three people who had read each other's practices stories ahead of time. Small group discussion of the profiles would allow us to focus on the practice of participants and would give everyone a chance to speak. After dinner, my hope was that we would *zoom out* to look at the bigger picture in plenary. We would discuss the questions that had been raised in the small groups, as well as the usefulness of CYD as a framework to look at their work, and we would reflect on the links across the stories, as well as the common structures behind them. Then we would cycle back to practice again by asking participants how what they had learned applied to their practice and what they might try changing when they went back to work.

I had shared this agenda with them ahead of time for feedback; only one participant had replied, expressing his hope that the retreat would be more free-flowing. I decided I needed to have faith that if I helped create trusting relationships and provided a space where people could enter into a dialogue, the necessary structures would emerge and the learning would likely flow. After all, this is what a lot of these educators had taught me through their stories. And that's what happened. We ended up not following my agenda, except for the time I had reserved to plan for the book the next morning. Two local women had to leave early [though they came back in the morning] and they wanted to hear the plenary conversation. The group was small and the ice was already broken. Those who voiced their opinion did not feel the need to split into smaller groups so we stayed in the larger group for the rest of the day.

Given the expectations and criticisms we shared, we agreed that a good place to take our reflection would be to deepen our understanding of the value of the work that the educators have been doing so that we could communicate it better. We chose to focus on the following questions: 1) Based on the profiles that you have read and your experience, what do you believe has value in this work? 2) What is it that you do that results in these good things? Amy, a participant who does media literacy with youth later suggested exploring what is "magic" about

the arts, so we did. As we reflected on these three questions, we referred sporadically to each other's profiles and brought up new anecdotes that illustrated our points. Having read at least two profiles each ahead of time, various participants were able to find links among their stories.

Through this discussion, some of the challenges of doing this work came up. For example, Jennifer, an educator who directs a puppetry program, expressed concern over her difficulty in reaching the youth she feels could really benefit from her program. Without organized transportation, it is difficult for young people who do not have parents available to drive them to be able to participate in programs. I was happy to see this point raised because 'who benefits?' and 'who should benefit?' from our programs are important questions to address in a critical reflection process. This led to a spontaneous exchange of ideas about how to reach young people and how to deal with barriers such as transportation problems.

Though these types of challenges were discussed briefly, the bulk of our time was spent talking about what is positive about this work. I felt divided between the satisfaction of seeing the value of the arts and of these practitioners' work affirmed through the sharing of stories, and the worry that acknowledging the significance of the educators' experiences was not enough. Most of these educators were not necessarily aiming for community development or making young people into agents of change (though one person clearly was), and I was hoping that they could see other potential roles they could be playing in the building of democracy. However, I found it difficult to ask challenging questions to get them to think critically or differently about their work.

What I did do is introduce the notion of Community Youth Development (CYD) because, as mentioned earlier, I thought it could serve as a useful lens through which to look at their work. CYD is gaining recognition as a movement that sees youth as partners in their own development and that of their community (Curnan and Hughes, 2002). Though rooted in the Progressive Era (Magnuson, Hudson, and Baldwin, 2002), it represents a paradigm shift from the prevention approach that presented youths as problems to be fixed to one where youth are problem solvers who can act as important catalysts for social change. It proposes that by engaging in projects of public value (such as certain arts projects), young people can gain skills, self-confidence, and relationships that can contribute to their own development as well as to the development of their communities. It is an approach that I find inspiring and that I would like to see used more broadly in 4-H.

I hesitated about how much to 'push' the idea of CYD because I did not want to impose a language on the participants. Bud found the term 'community' vague and wondered if it really meant anything where he lived and worked. This prompted a discussion around the meaning of community and whether the educators' work added up to community-building or not. Scott explained how he saw their work in the arts as contributing to a sense of community, and to building relationships, and leading people to be confident in what they have the capacity to do. He wondered whether it was a good idea to encourage educators to be more intentional about the

civic dimensions of their work or whether we should just trust that this would happen when educators open up a space for youth to be creative.

We came back to this discussion the next morning when I re-introduced the notion of CYD as a possible framework for our book. I wondered aloud whether it was an appropriate choice given Bud's doubts about the term 'community' and the fact that most of them were not explicitly aiming for community development in their work. After some negotiation of meanings, a conclusion was reached that it was useful to apply the lens of CYD to their stories—though some found it more useful than others—as it helped participants to look at their work from a different angle and explore new possibilities. We agreed that their work can add up to CYD even if they are not necessarily intentional about it; they are creating spaces where young people can express themselves, gain confidence in their abilities, develop relationships, practice democracy, imagine a better world, and educate their communities.

As we listened carefully to the participants' accounts of their practice, the message we wanted to communicate to readers of our book slowly began to take shape. The goal of these stories, we realized, is not about telling people how to replicate arts programs or about communicating to them a specific knowledge-base or set of skills that they need to learn. What we were discovering collectively, and what seems most significant to us, is that there is something deeply humanizing about using the arts for youth development. The stories we read and heard are filled with examples of young people who have opened up and grown through their involvement in the arts. We talked extensively about the importance of listening, of stepping out of the way, and of loving and trusting the young people we work with if the opportunities we create are to draw out young people's potential and allow them to open up. Donna, a participant who is a mental health professional, made the important point that what is required is not a bullet point list of what you need to do to set up an arts program but rather opportunities to reflect about how to become the kind of person who can allow that opening up process to happen. The profiles provided evidence that this process demands a 'quality of being,' a trustworthiness, and willingness to step out of the way even when that involves a certain degree of risk.

At the time of this writing, it is still too early to say whether reflecting collectively has affected the way these educators do their work (though some said that they were going to be more aware of some of the issues that were raised during the retreat). Naming their work and their difficulties publicly certainly reminded people of the significance and complexity of their practice. Based on evaluation comments and some recent conversations with individuals, it appears that the reflection on practice stories has overall been useful in terms of renewing at least some of the participants' commitment to the arts. I think it also generated hope that we can indeed promote this kind of work and slowly transform extension.

Although this whole process rested partly on a critique of the current situation, we may have missed opportunities to examine our work, and the social structures in which it takes place, more critically. With hindsight I can think of questions I should have asked, but at the time they did not occur to me. For instance, I could have challenged them to think about why it is difficult to step out of the way. I would have liked us to acknowledge more explicitly that the reasons are not solely personal; they are also political. Saying that this work requires a quality of being

without putting the practice stories into the political economic and organizational context is dangerous in that it can locate the blame on the educator. I should have asked more questions about the context in which their work takes place so that the conditions and power relations that make their work difficult could have become more obvious.

We could also have delved into the vision(s) that drives(s) us and the values that guide us when we are faced with such practical issues as transportation and scheduling problems. Educators make practical decisions in complex situations (within an organizational culture and structure and with a limited set of resources) and these decisions often determine who ends up benefiting, or not, from programs. We could have thought about the conditions or power relations that perpetuate inequality or impede 4-H from being more inclusive. The collective reflection process continues as we collaborate together to finish editing the profiles for publication. Part of my role in this process is to help and support educators to be more mindful of the barriers that need to be addressed for arts programs to make a significant difference in the building of a more just and democratic society.

Reflecting on Organizing Reflection

Processes of collective reflection are far less tidy in practice than they tend to sound in the literature. We have tried hard to retain the untidiness in the discussion of our cases, painting a picture of partial, but limited successes, along with some outright failures. In writing about and reflecting on our cases for this chapter, we have turned our thinking toward lessons that might guide our own continuing work and that of others who wish to organize and facilitate collective reflection to help generate the critical hope Freire speaks of as so essential for our efforts to 're-create the world.'

While we didn't use the phrase 'critical hope' in our projects until we set about writing this chapter, the more we thought about our experiences, the more we realized just how well that phrase seems to name what we were aiming for. We wanted to help the educators we were working with, as well as ourselves, to become more rather than less hopeful about the prospects for renewing the social action tradition in adult, community, and youth development education. But we wanted this hopefulness to be generated by and through a careful, critical process of 'taking account of concrete, material data,' to use Freire's words. In our cases, the data we took account of were practice stories from the educators' own work, captured in practitioner profiles and contextualized within the histories and cultures of the institutions and communities in which they worked.

The first lesson we draw from our experiences relates to the way we view, and therefore organize and facilitate, collective reflection that aims to generate critical hope. Our experiences confirmed and reinforced a conviction we held before we organized our projects: that such work

must be seen as a *long-term, developmental* process that is best pursued and sustained by including a 'first phase' devoted to an unhurried drawing out and consideration of *positive* ideals, commitments, values, knowledge, and practices, *before* moving to challenging questions about hegemonic assumptions and power dynamics. This developmental approach to collective, critical reflection emphasizes the 'building up' of people's thinking and understandings, rather than a 'tearing down' that shows them where they are wrong, why and how they are being misled or duped, etc. It is based on the belief that people are more likely to be willing and able to rethink their assumptions and practices (i.e., to learn) when they feel respected and validated than when they are criticized and put on the defensive. It should be seen as an *expansion* of, rather than a *substitute* for, approaches to critical reflection that primarily emphasize an examination of hegemonic assumptions and submerged power dynamics. One of its virtues is that it helps to check or restrain the tendency facilitators and participants often have to 'rush to judgment' (Coles, 1989) about their own and others' work and experiences without knowing what people are doing, resulting in analyses that are not trustworthy because they are not drawn from a careful process of listening to people's stories and reflecting on them.

A second set of lessons relates to the value and importance of practitioner profiles, both in terms of the process of constructing them and their use as tools in the collective reflection process. With respect to the profile *process*, the act of listening carefully and sympathetically to educators' stories and experiences gave us a structured way to build trust and respect between ourselves and the educators. In part, it allowed us first to *listen*, rather than to *lecture* or *advise*, flipping the roles usually played between campus-based researchers and practitioners.

The profile process also helped us to practice a core principle in adult education: meeting people where they are, beginning with what they already know and think and believe. It gave us a way to anchor our work in an experience that drew educators out and opened them up. The result was not just instrumental storytelling, but deeper levels of reflection and meaning making. While our interviews were designed in large part to draw out concrete practice stories that would help reveal the range of what educators do in their work, they also included questions that were designed to generate reflection and meaning making at an individual level. People are active, creative meaning-makers, and providing opportunities for them to be listened to carefully, with interest and respect, catalyzes that process. Our experiences bore the truth of this out. In these projects, as well as in other similar efforts, many educators profiled have told us that the process of being 'interviewed' for a profile (that is, of having the story of their work listened to carefully and respectfully), helped them understand that work differently than they had before. For some, particularly for some community educators who are seen as little more than 'program aides' by the extension system in spite of decades of skilled practice, it fostered a new sense of the importance of their work and of themselves as skilled practitioners. Others have reported to us – a day or a week or a year – after the interview that they 'haven't stopped thinking about it' and have new understandings of just what their work entailed.

With respect to profiles as *products*, the profiles we constructed turned out to be valuable both in helping participants see and appreciate what is good, significant, and meaningful in their own and others' work, *and* for providing material to draw on when considering critical questions

about assumptions and practices. Some of our colleagues have questioned the ability of people's own stories to 'accurately' reflect what they 'really do.' Clearly these profiles are a construction – and only one of many possible constructions – about the extension educators' practice. In fact, on a different day or a different context, the same educators might have told us different stories or told us the same stories in a different way. Further, there are obviously aspects of their practice that remain hidden and unnamed. To unearth them would require other approaches and tools.

At the same time, practice profiles provide a deeper, richer portrait than that sketched by the discourses that dominate this (and other) workplaces. In our projects, we saw firsthand how, in their rich particularity, stories about practice can pose issues, reveal concerns, characterize problems, socialize, cultivate imagination, teach what we do and who we are, show possibilities, and disclose and transmit value (Coles, 1989; Nussbaum, 1990; Forester, 1999). The practice stories we captured in the profiles were at once inspiring, informative, and troubling. They engaged not only people's minds, but also their emotions and senses. They gave people a chance to see or reconnect with what it is they are ultimately working for, beyond immediate goals and the instrumental outcomes they are required to report to their funders.

By allowing educators to see their thoughts and stories in print, the profiles provided them with a distanced perspective on their own thinking and work. Thus, the profiles helped us to take on what Brookfield (1987, p. 75) sees as one of the most useful tasks facilitators can perform: 'to reflect back to [people] their attitudes, rationalizations, and habitual ways of thinking and acting, ... to function as a mirror, allowing individuals to view their own motivations, actions and justifications as if they were those of others.' This is not to say that people do not engage in critical thinking and reflecting in the everyday business of life. Rather, it highlights our efforts to *organize* such reflection and, in doing so, our attempts to help channel critical thinking and reflection along potentially new paths.

We learned that the profiles were key in helping to channel and open up reflection. As Rosalyn McMullin, a CUCE-NYC educator observed, "The profiles ... reflect like a mirror. When I look at the profiles ... I'm not just looking at it as a profile about a specific place or a specific program. You can always find something in anybody's profile that can be you. I take it very personally." In other words, profiles can be read and reflected upon not just for the knowledge they contain, but for the 'vicarious testing of life possibilities by readers ... that they permit ...' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 41). This enabled a deeper level and quality of reflection than would have been possible otherwise, especially as people read and discussed each other's profiles and discovered different perspectives on the meaning and significance of their work.

A third set of lessons concerns our role as 'facilitators' of collective reflection. Too often, that term is interpreted as meaning that one ought to be a 'neutral' party, devoid of agenda or intent. However, handing people profiles and simply asking what they think is not the same – nor as effective – as functioning as an *educator* who brings in new perspectives that may help people

move beyond their experience to deeper levels of reflection and meaning-making. While educators must *begin* with the work of understanding people's experience and practice by drawing out their knowledge, they must then move to a second step of 'invent[ing] with the people the ways for them to *go beyond* their state of thinking' (Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 98). As the American popular educator Myles Horton warned, without the crucial piece of offering something new, 'popular educators begin to walk in a circle, without the possibility of going beyond the circle. . . . You can't have a spiral, you'll just have a circle that stays flat . . .' (Horton and Freire 1990, pp. 99, 100). In our work with the New York City educators, we tried to catalyze a spiraling process of reflection and meaning-making on the essence of their work by providing them with a passage about 'developmental leaders' from Mary Belenky and her colleagues (1997), saying that it reminded us of what we had heard from them and asking them whether they found it relevant. This was our way of offering (without imposing) a new, counter-hegemonic perspective that might generate such a spiraling of thought. The fact that this paradigm has entered the organization's internal discourse indicates at least some movement beyond the 'flat circle' of established ways of thinking.

Finally, we draw lessons from our experience in dealing with the challenges of organizing and facilitating collective reflection within an institutional culture that expects professional development programs to have an instrumental focus on training people in content knowledge, organizational skills and/or technical problem-solving: that is, in training people 'how to do things.' As Robert Kegan and Karen Lahey (2001, p. 71) note, 'Most of what goes under the banner of professional development amounts to helping us develop more skills or capacities to cope within the world of our assumptive designs. The design itself is never in question, or even visible.' Bringing 'the design' into question '...cannot be accomplished through *informational* training, the acquisition of skills, but only through *transformational* education, a 'leading out' from an established habit of mind' (Kegan 1994, p. 232), a process that includes organized critical reflection. Such reflection requires us to work to consciously surface and examine the political and ethical dimensions and consequences of people's work, which are too often 'shrouded' (Wilson 2001, p. 74) by a singular focus on technical matters. It requires a focus on the values, assumptions and perspectives that shape people's understanding of the *right* things to be doing, the kind of 'double loop' learning that Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1996) proposed. And it would do well to incorporate a third, reflexive loop that would assist them to examine typically unchallenged, but favored or dominant, points of view, with the goal of helping them to make intelligent and responsible choices between interests and purposes without slipping into 'repetitive re-endorsements' of a dominant model. Similar to Freire's notion of conscientization, such a 'triple loop' model (Flood and Romm, 1996) helps people analyze how their values, assumptions, and understandings are mediated by particular worldviews and to ask whose interests those serve and why.

Challenges to institutional norms, however, are never simple or straightforward. Thus, while we found sincere support for a more reflective or transformational approach to staff development from the educators and, in the case of CUCE-NYC, from administrators as well, we also continually bumped into established habits and assumptions about professional development

training. Our work together was defined, in part, by expectations about how professional educators 'should sound,' which led some educators to edit – either during the interviews or in reviews of later printed profile drafts – what they were willing to say about their work and how. Educators' desire to 'translate' written narratives back into the narrow, flat, technical language that dominates public discourse within the extension system was widespread, and, occasionally, unyielding. Of course, this was not merely a matter of individual predilection, but rather, decisions of risk-taking and survival grounded in an organizational history of differential value and reward, further influenced by internalized notions about 'credibility' and 'worth.'

Reflection was also constrained by some participants' understandable desire to use our work together to generate promotional materials to justify their programs to potential and current funders (particularly in a period of severe budget cuts). We faced ongoing concerns about how this work should be represented within the politics of the extension system and/or the university at large. And as facilitators of this process, we were sometimes made more timid than we ought to have been by our awareness of the power dynamics of our own ongoing positions (as graduate students and an untenured faculty member), positions which provide both freedom and vulnerability within the university and extension systems.

Such institutional realities remind us that critical reflection is never organized in a vacuum, but rather, is itself influenced by the very assumptions and power relations we are trying to help people to question. There is a dynamic and complex interplay between social structures that condition and constrain and the ability of human beings to 'go beyond [their] own conditioning' (Freire, 1998). As a result, in the short term, 'success' is likely to be partial, and change is likely to be incremental.

Still, within this process of change, we found that using practitioner profiles to ground reflection can help introduce more complex levels of reflection, helping people begin to question not only what is done, but why and for whom. In the two projects we discussed in this chapter, the profiles indicated more than *what* people did. Their stories highlighted *what mattered* – reflecting back for a more open, public discussion the norms, values and assumptions underlying that work. In the New York City project, for example, in organizing a space for people to collectively reflect on their own practice stories, we provided permission for people to talk about something they knew privately (although perhaps hadn't articulated fully to themselves), but hadn't talked about publicly. Thus, some of the CUCE-NYC educators told us that they knew that 'compassion, caring and loving' people was central to their work, but had never talked about it publicly with each other before; they now do so on a more regular basis. This is not a trivial thing. Changing how people talk about their work might, in fact, in some way change the way they work, and the way particular kinds of work are valued (Kegan and Lahey, 2001).

In our work to date, the third, reflexive, loop has not yet been given the full attention it deserves. However, our projects are not yet complete. In future sessions, we intend to ask people questions about why the unexpressive 'technical assistance' language has come to predominate as

a description for extension practice, whose interests that serves and why. We will ask what it would mean to understand the work of adult, community, and youth development education in terms of its contributions to the project of democracy and to the decidedly unflashy, often mundane, day-to-day work of nurturing people and communities. We will ask what assumptions underlie current formulations about 'program development,' 'outcomes,' and measurements of 'effectiveness,' which need to be questioned and changed, what barriers to change might need to be overcome, and what avenues for change already exist.

To generate the *critical* part of the critical hope we are aiming for, we need to do a better job than we have to date of helping people 'tunnel under' (Tilly, 2003) their stories, contextualizing them, examining why a particular set of stories predominate, and exploring the consequences of creating new organizational stories. Without such questions, reflecting on personal experience leaves people oblivious to the broader social, political and historical context in which that experience occurred (Horton and Freire, 1990; Brookfield, 1995; Brookfield and Preskill 1999). But focusing on such questions alone, can cause us – and those whose reflections we are trying to organize – to rapidly succumb to that 'energy-sapping, radical pessimism' of which Brookfield warns. Such questions must be tied to the understanding that the work of organizing critical reflection is a long-term, developmental process. Focusing first on 'what is good here,' what is strong and what is right; anchoring our practice in a process that provides opportunities for people to be listened to carefully, with interest and respect; and building off the power of stories to engage people's hearts as well as their minds can enable us to begin to formulate an answer to Brookfield's question about how we can 'remain critical and yet optimistic while practicing a pedagogy of hope.'

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