

Sustainability, Democracy, Pedagogy: On Locating Ourselves in Dark Times

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The one question threading through my life here on this beautiful Earth is about how to be fully present to my world – present enough to rejoice and be useful – while we as a species are progressively destroying it.

Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self*

As the recession continues, administrators in higher education across the nation are responding to deep cuts from state legislatures and precipitous drops in endowments by becoming leaner and meaner: imposing hiring freezes, laying off and furloughing staff, sweetening early retirement packages for regular rank professors to clear the way for cheaper nontenurable labor and, against the will and wisdom of faculty, rapidly increasing distance learning courses “sold” as innovations, and so on. Marc Bousquet makes clear in his groundbreaking book, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low Wage Nation*, that many of these strategies are not new. Perhaps the most dramatic indication of his point is the fact that thirty-five years ago, 75% of US faculty were tenurable while today that figure is 25%.¹ These statistics map a decades-long process Bousquet refers to as the “casualization of labor”.² Driven by administrative decisions in the increasingly corporatized environment of higher education, the result has been the formation of a contingent, vulnerable and exploited academic labor force—the new faculty majority.

The recession has accelerated these long-term trends, providing fresh opportunities for those agents of change whose mission is to deepen the transformation from academic to corporate culture. It is not hard to feel the institutional demoralization setting in. For those of us working in sustainability studies whose problems require sharp new thinking and initiatives, and the resources to support them, this can be especially dispiriting. We must and can resist this. I discuss here a case of constructive resistance underway at Northern Arizona University (NAU). I believe it is an important model of ways not only to survive these dark times but, as Joanna Macy puts it, to rejoice and be useful. If teachers and creative administrators are able to do this and to pass such capacities on to our young people, surely we will have found a pedagogy present to our world and worthy of emulation.

I do not pen such hopeful words easily. We launched the case I discuss here in the Fall of 2009 as the recession blasted across the state. Currently competing with a handful of states for “most devastated,” Arizona’s economy before the bubble burst is best described as a Ponzi scheme, dependent upon a constant influx of people to feed the construction industry, an ever

¹ See Marc Bousquet, *How The University Works, Higher Education and the Low Wage Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), p. 2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

hotter housing market supported by unscrupulous lenders, and a generalized feeding frenzy on the fraudulent profits. Today, nearly 1/3 of our state revenues are gone, and the legislature is controlled by politicians who do not mind at all using the disaster to further weaken structures and capacities of governance in the state. While some signs of recovery are beginning to appear across the nation, there is little good news in Arizona. Education, already chopped, will be on the chopping block again and for years to come.

My argument here is for a kind of engaged pedagogy. It rests on the proposition that just as our best thinking arises out of profound, even anguished concern with problems and crises of the present, so too our most useful pedagogy emerges from *locating ourselves*, by which I mean becoming oriented *and formed* by the challenges of our present. Global ecological disaster, intensification of deep poverty across the world, concentration of corporate power and the concomitant blows to democratic initiative and power, and an increasingly totalizing global form of civilization that depends upon detaching human beings from their practical and spiritual relationship to the living world, – a condition Freeman House refers to as the condition of being orphaned, these are among our most pressing – and interrelated – challenges as we face ecological crisis.³ To this daunting list must be added an incisive understanding of just where *we*, the pedagogues, *are*. That is, if our most useful pedagogy emerges from *locating ourselves*, then we must not exclude the acute conditions of higher education in which we attempt to do our work. Following Bousquet, Carey Nelson and the work of others, the situation of higher education today is one of “dizzying inequalities” in which an energized, well paid, mostly white male managerial class increases its control over University life while eviscerating faculty governance, collegiality, and self-determination. Through a persistent policy that wrings money from faculty pay by increasing the number of adjuncts, lecturers, and graduate student workers, managers succeed in “diversifying” workplace culture in the direction of isolation, fragmentation, fear, and loss of relationship through which a sense of shared endeavor and solidarity of mission might be cultivated. Carey Nelson refers to this growing disproportionately female assemblage of disposable workers as a “lumpen professoriate.”⁴

What kind of pedagogy could possibly meet these challenges? For some years now efforts to establish rigorous service learning programs on campuses, and more recently to develop a culture and pedagogy of civic engagement have made inroads against the still dominant pedagogical model’s demand that the learning and the teaching self empty itself in the service of detached knowing.⁵ Educational formation of this kind is both painful for developing selves and, as many teachers and theorists have argued, dangerous.⁶ Foremost among its dangers is that it is the pedagogical foundation for eviscerated democracy and a civilization that fouls the earth, for the weakened selves it forms have neither the practical nor the spiritual resources to work on our deepest challenges. Pedagogy today must be engaged in the following sense: it must teach the skills and cultivate an ethos of democratic organizing, “freeing the

³ See *Totem Salmon: Life Lessons from Another Species* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), p. 28.

⁴ See Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt, *Academic Keywords: A Devil’s Dictionary for Higher Education* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 208.

⁵ For the important differences between service learning and civic engagement and a thoughtful overview of civic engagement initiatives in higher education, see Harry Boyte, “Against the Current: Developing the Civic Agency of Students.” <http://www.changemag.org/Archives/Back%20Issues/May-June%202008/full-against-the-current.html>.

⁶ Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* remains an energizing critique of this kind of formation and a stimulating vision of alternatives to it.

powers,” as Jane Addams put it,⁷ so that our energies and talents create a gathering storm. To do this, and this is a central argument of this paper, faculty, staff and administrators must rework our *own* capacities and create novel structures *in which we can do so*. To address the assaults on tenure, labor, and community in higher education and to teach well in our times, we must ourselves become students, learning the pleasures and arts of making common cause: of creating synergies and collaborative structures, and of developing the resilient capabilities to innovate. To do so requires both rejecting the disciplinary silos that so hinder our capacity to prepare students for complex problems, and refusing to be bound by the enervating divisions between tenurable and nontenable, university and community, teacher and learner, young and old.⁸

Creating Multiple “Schools of Democracy” – The Design

In the Fall of 2009, the SUS/SEED pilot engaged learning project was launched at NAU as a joint endeavor of the Program in Community, Culture and the Environment, the Master of Arts in Sustainable Communities, the First Year Seminar Program, and Residential Life. Twenty-three first year students came to NAU that fall drawn to live together in the newly created Residential Learning Community called SEED (Sustainable Environments and Engaged Democracy). All of these students were enrolled in a course, “Democracy, Social Justice and the Environment”. The readings, structure, and objectives of the course paralleled the first of three required courses for twenty-six new students in the Master of Arts in Sustainable Communities (SUS) Program. A thirteen year old interdisciplinary applied program, SUS is a pioneer in Sustainability Studies; the course is called, “Visions of Good and Sustainable Communities: Self, Other, Community”.

Recognizing that the political arts cannot simply be learned from books, but must be exercised, that democracy is a way of being together and therefore must be practiced, both courses required students to select a community based Action Research Team (an ART) from among seven possibilities (outlined below). Each ART thus consisted of first year students and Masters students as well as a faculty or staff facilitator. The mix of multi-age teams (ranging from 18-70!) was designed to encourage mentoring of inexperienced by experienced, young by old and the too rare opportunities for *reciprocal* learning. These teams joined with a variety of community partners to develop grassroots leadership practices and skills to enhance good and sustainable communities. Students were required to devote three hours each week to their ART work.

The Action Research Teams:

- **Public Achievement** – grassroots democracy education coaching with Killip elementary school students. Situated in one of Flagstaff’s poorest, most diverse neighborhoods, Killip’s overwhelmingly Hispanic and Native students choose issues of public stewardship to work on and cultivate the next generation of leadership as they do so.
- **Weatherization and Community Building** – working to weatherize homes and cultivate community relationships and capacities in Sunnyside and Southside neighborhoods, two of Flagstaff’s most vibrant, diverse and poor neighborhoods.
- **Immigration Issues and Northern Arizona Interfaith Council** – working with a broad-based group to improve understanding, respect, and collaborations that enhance a

⁷ Quoted in *Voices of Hope: The Story of the Jane Addams School for Democracy*, edited by Nan Kari and Nan Skelton (Dayton, Ohio: Kettering Foundation Press, 2007), p.3.

⁸ To this project of “freeing the powers,” we must add unionization drives to protect nontenable faculty and graduate employees. It is in these struggles by contingent faculty and graduate employees, as Bousquet points out, that an emergent and vigorous faculty culture is arising. See Bousquet, p. 31.

community of freedom, equality, and engaged democracy between new immigrants and American citizens.

- ***Water Issues and Friends of Flagstaff's Future*** – working on water scarcity and sustainability in northern Arizona, particularly in relation to developing policy concerning recent corporate efforts to tap into a local aquifer and privatize for purposes of selling bottled water.
- ***Urban Gardening and Agriculture with Students for Sustainable Living and Urban Gardenin(SSLUG) and Native Movements*** – working on campus and in the community to promote community gardening, fruit tree planting, and research on traditional agricultural practices. Study and implement modes of organizing these efforts that cultivate broad participation and durable networks.
- ***Food Security and Sustainability and Flagstaff Foodlink*** – in collaboration, assembling a broad and diverse Community Food Task Force to assess Flagstaff food security needs and facilitate policy changes to influence how the local food system impacts health, addresses hunger and food insecurity, and supports an economically viable, socially just and environmentally sustainable food system.
- ***Public Space on Campus for Civic Engagement, Sustainability, Issues Forums/ Sustainability CAFÉ!*** - working with students in other organizations to research and initiate the creation of a public space/café where students, faculty, and staff regularly meet to discuss pertinent issues, engage speakers, organize deliberation and action.

To prepare for this undertaking, we assembled a diverse facilitator team composed of two faculty, three recent graduates of the SUS Program, a recent Ph.D. in anthropology, one staff person/adjunct faculty, and a recent NAU graduate in an Americorp position. Some were directly paid for this work and some were not. This multi -age,- rank and -disciplinary team met every two weeks throughout the semester and became an exciting, generative site of our own educational formation – a “community of practice” in which diverse ages, institutional affiliations, power, and training fed our capacity for creative work together.

The pilot project was thus anchored in the University and Flagstaff community in several key ways: in the strongly supported First Year Residential and First Year Seminar Programs, both of which are designed to attract and retain top students; in the Master of Arts in Sustainable Community Program, a nationally-known applied program and pioneer in Sustainability Studies; and in the Program in Community, Culture and the Environment, an endowed program at NAU devoted to fostering collaborative, cross-disciplinary problem solving at and beyond the university. In addition, both faculty and two of the facilitators had extensive training and experience in community organizing through the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), the nation’s oldest grassroots democracy inter-faith network. Among other things, this experience with grassroots organizing enabled us to make and sustain vital connections with community partners.

One final anchor: the goals and objectives of the SUS/SEED engaged learning project have roots in the culture of the University itself – in both its historical self-understandings and initiatives as well as in its aspirations (see Strategic Goals sidebar).⁹ Distilling the essence of the

Sidebar

Strategic Goals

- Learning-centered university
- Student access, learning, persistence and affordability

⁹ NAU recently became a member institution of The American Democracy Project, a civic engagement initiative of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities.

- Sustainability and stewardship of place
- Global engagement
- A culture of inclusion, civility and respect
- A commitment to Native Americans
- Innovative, effective and accountable practices

University's strategic goals, and conjuring a bracing mission for the University, President John Haeger said, "the salient theme is a call for active citizenship in local, regional, state, and world communities. As a dynamic cooperative of talented and enthusiastic visionaries, we are an agent of *social change*."¹⁰

Of course mission is one thing, just what it means on the ground amidst the powerful shaping forces of higher education today is quite another. These include dependence on corporate funding for research and new capital projects, vulnerability to the political strong arm of state politicians, and the hierarchical nature of bureaucratic structures and processes whose pedagogies daily school selves in anti-democratic skills and habits, ironically disabling the institutional imagination needed to realize the very educational aspirations the institution professes. Equally powerful is the "new" organizational/managerial orientation of administrators, mentioned above, who increasingly squeeze faculty pay while expanding their own, and amass power through strategies that range from coopting faculty, to coopting vocabularies that don't actually forward what they appear to, to the cagey commandeering of the space for initiative so that faculty become reactors not initiators. (Many faculty senates are a case in point).

These realities make it imperative that engaged learning initiatives like the SUS/SEED Project be anchored in a strong tradition of community organizing that to date has almost no foothold at institutions of higher learning. With this foundation, we can create *and sustain* dense relational webs between the university and the wider community in which grassroots democratic organizing culture can be nurtured, enlivening the sense of what is possible through the serendipitous synergies and emergent processes that collaborations make possible.¹¹ And we can better nurture the relational power faculty and graduate employees need in order to take back governance structures within the university itself.

In sum, it is not only students who need to learn the arts of democracy. It is faculty, staff, progressive administrators and the wider communities of which they are a part who must, together, cultivate the democratic skills, pleasures, visions *and relational culture* with which to combat the enervating isolation towards which institutional demoralization pushes us in these dark times. To develop resilient capabilities for innovation today requires a pedagogy of democratic organizing and engagement.

The Pedagogy

Living in the Tension: Reenchanted Democracy

Alexis de Toqueville thought the great potential of voluntary associations was to be "little schools of democracy". Broadly speaking, the aim of our community based ARTS is to become schools where students practice and learn the habits, skills and dispositions of democracy. Their collaborative work invites them into the great tension of public life: the tension between the world as it is and the world as it could be. Ed Chambers, long-time organizer and recently

¹⁰ See <http://www4.nau.edu/president/perspectives/planning.htm>.

¹¹ On web making and serendipity in community organizing processes, see the inspiring work of John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

retired director of IAF, calls this place the place where we find our moral compass.¹² So, learning how to find this moral compass, and how to *sustain* it by living in this tension—these are important things we teach. As students learn to enliven this tension for one another in the work they do, they experience the possibility of participating in meaningful social change, developing a realistic faith that their hope for a better world is no fool’s dream. Erik Erikson has long argued that people cut off from the wellspring of a collectively derived sense of participation are chronically prone to depression, anxiety, and demoralization. Our pedagogy aims to allow students to experience the joy of collective endeavor.

The Art of Stories: Learning to Locate Ourselves

We work very intensively in the classroom in the opening weeks to help students learn to story themselves in the world, believing their facility in doing so enhances their democratic organizing capacity. Using the wonderful work of Marshall Ganz, “What is Public Narrative?” we open our semester conversation asking them not to empty or eclipse themselves, but rather to start from the sacred: from their own stories of place, family, history, world; from what they *know* and from where *they are known*.¹³ Their first assignment is to write their own public narrative by weaving together stories that respond to three crucial questions posed by Ganz: *what am I called to do, what is my community called to do, and what are we called to do now?* This is far harder than it might seem. It takes students from a discerning search among the deep shaping sources of their own passions and convictions (story of self) to the wider values, principles, social struggles, traditions, and aspirations of which their convictions are a part (story of we) to an account of the urgency of action as they see it (story of the now). Students work and re-work these public narratives, condensing and honing them, making them crisper and more gutsy, and thus usable. These are not analyses, but stories, and as the *storytellers*, students weave themselves *actively* into the world in a process of becoming, which most experience as profoundly revelatory and sometimes painful. For example, one student worked with her largely unprocessed experience of teaching and connecting deeply to orphaned children in Jamaica who she then had to leave. Guilty, confused and inspired, through her public narrative she began to connect her experiences to a larger tradition and vision of education, empowerment, and social justice, and to speak powerfully about their meaning and urgency today. Students learn this art of storytelling not only through writing, but they practice it again and again in the organizing work of their ARTs, becoming adept and nimble at telling stories in which their own vulnerable yearnings for the world form the living center. We start here, believing this is the wellspring of their capacity to form deep and sustaining relationships with others around common public work; we want them to learn this art of slipping on their own power and passions to connect to the power and passions of others – others who people our present and others who people the collective past we inherit.

Reciprocal Learning

Faculty are fairly ill-prepared to teach this art, given their acculturation in graduate institutions whose pedagogy demands the eclipse of the worldly self in order to attain that magical space of objectivity. To help ourselves unlearn this, the facilitator group had multiple meetings prior to the start of class where we presented our own public narratives, received and gave coaching, re-wrote and retold our narratives, and reflected together on what we were

¹² See *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action and Justice* (New York: Continuum, 2004), chapter one.

¹³ See “What is Public Narrative,” <http://grassrootsfund.org/docs/WhatIsPublicNarrative08.pdf>. Years of civil rights organizing in the South and with the United Farm Workers informs Ganz’s teaching about public narrative which he now does at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government.

learning. We made some primary discoveries, among which is the necessity of being open-hearted and vulnerable, and that the important difference between telling and conveying has to do with being able to *use* this open-heartedness and vulnerability in our storytelling to emotionally connect to others. But we also learned that this art of digging into our lives so that we are capable of saying something personal about our concern for the world is not the same as digging into our private lives, that sharing our passions, fears and drives is not necessarily the same as sharing the intimate details of our lives. And we discovered over and over again just how mysterious our worldly drives and passions are, how unpracticed we are at crafting them into a public story, at working what C. Wright Mills called “the sociological imagination.”

Yet, perhaps the most fundamental thing we discovered was that if there was going to be any *teaching* of this narrative art, not only students but teachers and facilitators would have to engage their *own material* to craft a public story. Faculty in the classroom and facilitators in the ARTs were going to have to use their own lives to connect with others; they were going to have to practice vulnerability, use their intuition, and listen to students’ coaching. Reciprocal learning would have to be central.

This discovery propelled me to tell my own public narrative in the second class meeting of my seminar. I wanted to model a public narrative, but I also sought their help in strengthening my own. Students listened and coached; I listened and recrafted; we decided that others would model theirs. The process was exhilarating and not a little frightening. I believe we experienced in those opening weeks just how much *we needed each other* in order to learn these things; that this was a communal art for which reciprocity was the *sine qua non*. Much in the same way musical improvisation breaks down the hierarchy between composer and musician – something found in communal musical traditions, our work with public narrative breaks down the institutional hierarchy between teacher and student.¹⁴ Differences in skills, talent, and experience remain relevant, but they are joined to the essentially collective endeavor to enter into the never finished process of making who we are central to our capacity to be agents of social transformation.

Complex Negotiation with Difference

In an early conversation, just several weeks into her first year of college, my daughter commented, “I’m not even sure that throwing a bunch of young people altogether for four years is the best way to learn.” We also radically question this, and so the way the ARTs bring students into a complex negotiation with difference is crucial to our pedagogy. In their ARTs students get to work among profound differences of age, experience, and knowledge, and they engage the specific social class and ethnic diversities of their community. So, first year students, fresh out of high school, work as equals alongside Master’s students who often have years of worldly skills and experience. And *together* they work with community members: people who may have been active for decades, native people whose ancestors have lived in the region for thousands of years, recent immigrants from across the border who have come with fears, vulnerabilities, and cultural understandings and practices often far different from their own.

The increasingly segmented and gated nature of our society provides all people with fewer and fewer occasions to encounter one another across differences and around common purposes.¹⁵ For young people this feature of our world is intensified. An increasingly ubiquitous corporate-mediatized youth culture creates a largely hermetically sealed youth world

¹⁴ Thanks to Larissa Oryshkevich whose wonderful essay sparked this association. See “Music for People as a Living, Transformative Model of Community,” in *Connections*.

¹⁵ For a discussion of this see Author, 1999.

that encourages cultivation of disrespect toward elders and a sense of helplessness, confusion, and anxiety in adults. The ARTs offer a profound invitation to young people (for which I believe most actually hunger) to join themselves to the adult world. Working with multi-ages on discrete and concrete projects students encounter the complex beauties – struggles, challenges and aspirations, of the diverse world in which they live.¹⁶ The ARTs help them learn how to resist the amnesia and disassociation that so enfeebles our political power and nurtures the uglier pleasures of which we are so capable.

Expansive Sense of Time

Related to this pedagogical aim is our effort to expand their sense of time. As students practice their public narratives in the classroom and use them to connect to others in the organizing work of their ARTs, we aim to cultivate a deeper historical sensibility crucial to democratic power. Elise Boulding suggests that we *actually live* in “a 200 year present”. If, she suggests, we calculate “the present” by subtracting the date of birth of the oldest person we have known in our lives from the projected passing-on date of the youngest person in our family, we locate ourselves in an expansive lived sense of the present.¹⁷ The work we do with public narrative in and out of the classroom allows students to *experience* this expanded sense of the present, for it is integral to the sacred power of story. For example, at the first combined Foodlink ART meeting, we asked each person to tell a story that conveyed why their work with community food security and justice was important to them. What emerged was an expanding movement in time: our stories moved us backwards to the lives, practices and worlds of our grandparents and great grandparents – the way they shared, grew, and built community around food, lost family forms to corporate growers, and became increasingly disconnected from the life of food. And it moved us forward with our concerns and hopes for the lives of our children. This kaleidoscope of vivid stories gave an historical intensity of feeling and understanding that deepened our mission of fostering a socially just and environmentally sustainable food system.

Thus, the work we do with stories cultivates an expansive sense of the present. This is crucial to a pedagogy of democratic organizing and sustainability because it stands against two of the most powerful and destructive dynamics of contemporary power: delocalization and dehistoricization. Karl Polanyi’s brilliant study of the origins of capitalist political economy illuminates the first, showing what ordinary everyday experience confirms: namely, that the dynamism in our society derives substantially from a political economy that produces constant mobility, over and over again extracting selves from local practices and relationships that otherwise could ground and extend their knowledge and power beyond a very narrow and weak sense of the present.¹⁸ For its part, liberal social contract theory, our dominant political story, makes two primary unhistorical assumptions: first that the contracting persons are equal because they have no prior history, and second, that the contract itself represents a fresh beginning for society. Together these assumptions utterly obscure the always complex histories that bear us,

¹⁶ This pedagogical “duty” of inviting young people into the world is one of the central tasks of educators. Hannah Arendt calls this “teaching about the world as it is”. See her provocative essay, “What is Education?” in *Between Past and Future* (Middlesex, England, 1959).

¹⁷ See *Building a Global Civic Culture: Educating for an Interdependent World* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), p. 3.

¹⁸ Polanyi refers to this large dynamic as a process of disembeddedness in which economic power is increasingly freed from political power and decision. See *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

histories that are, as Sheldon Wolin so powerfully argues, our inheritance.¹⁹ Deeply interwoven into our liberal political sensibility and imaginary, then, is the foreboding sense (so familiar to wave upon wave of immigrants) that the price of membership is dehistoricization. That is, to attain entry into a fabled land of equality and opportunity requires forgetting the historical conflicts and struggles born of inequality that have shaped us (and every political order known to humans).

In a process of discovery, public narrative helps students encounter these dynamics and search out sources of their own counterpower. So, for example, one student began to interrogate the long silence her now middle class parents have maintained about their lives as migrant farm workers. In the process she discovered just how weak her own sense of temporal extension has been. As she deepened her historical understanding of migrant farm workers' struggle for civil rights she also began to piece together the dynamics of power that shaped her parents' silence and her own political and social identity.

Thus, against a formidable array of delocalizing and dehistoricizing powers, our engaged pedagogy teaches students (and ourselves!) to honor what is sacred: the (his)stories which are the tender roots of our capacities to transform the world. We refuse to see our stories as insignificant sources of insight, as trivial and personal in the privative sense of that important term. We learn and we teach the way they are central to our power, the ground on which we can stand, our opening out onto the world.

Relational Meetings/Relational Power

We put these stories to work in our organizing in many ways, but key is the relational meeting. The relational meeting was developed out of years of organizing experience by Ed Chambers, now the executive director of the IAF. We draw heavily on it and adapt it. Students read about it and discuss it in class, and then conduct many, many of these 1-on-1 meetings, with each member of their ART, including their professors and facilitators, and with community members with whom they work. In this short (30 minute) face to face meeting, "one spirit goes after another person's spirit" searching out the deep tissue of what motivates their partner towards social transformation.²⁰ Students use and adapt their public narratives and practice the art of close listening to the stories of others, discerning whether and how their concerns and visions converge, whether and how they can forge the necessary depth of emotional connection around shared public work. These meetings can be agitational. Chambers calls them risky, reciprocal events,²¹ "the glue" of broad-based organizing, the "radical source" of sustaining solidarity in the diverse collectivity of our democratic society.²²

Gaining understanding of others through this risky reciprocal experience, students learn their capacity for relational power. This, in contradistinction to power over, is the power to be affected by another, to be affected so as to move forward *together*, shaped and changed by the beings of others, capable of becoming a powerful gathering storm. This is a key capacity we aim to teach.

Organizing Skills/Organizing Ethos

The engaging work of the ARTs teaches many fundamental organizing skills. Students practice how to translate ambitions, dreams, and ideas into realistic strategy; they learn how to

¹⁹ See "Contract and Birthright" in *Presence of the Past: Essays on the State and the Constitution* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1989).

²⁰ *Roots for Radicals*, p.44.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48

²² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

research issues, how to do a power analysis so they know who they need to get into relationship with in order to effect the changes they are after; how to organize and manage time; to fundraise; make cold calls; how to listen, challenge, intuit and to judge; and how to hold themselves and others accountable to their shared work.

Beyond this plethora of concrete organizing skills, perhaps the most important thing we hope students learn through their ART work is to take an organizing *approach* to social change; to develop a democratic organizing *ethos*. This means to develop a deep disposition to approach social change as a process rather than as a project, a process in which weaving dense relational webs that create relational power is the sustaining center.²³

Sustainability

Toward the end of the semester as we discussed Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma*, a student wondered aloud how long what he learned from the book would stay with him, how long he would try to work against the industrial food system for an alternative food economy. The question was crucial as it spoke to the creativity and power of the industrial political economy. Through the ARTs we hope to give students experiences that will drive home our pedagogy on this point: we say to them that what Pollan and so many others have to teach will continue to actively shape your lives just as long as you remain engaged with *and by* a community of others similarly engaged. In the wonderful phrase of Joanna Macy, what you learn will remain alive so long as you are "breathed by" a community of others.

The question here is not merely how to sustain our knowledge, but how to sustain its capacity to drive us into creative relationship. In some important sense what we are doing with the ARTs is creating what Czech dissident Vaclav Benda called, in a different context, the "parallel polis" where, alongside existing institutions, alternative structures and practices of community and care are in the making. To these ends it is important that there are *seven* ARTs, *seven* sites where alternative visions and understandings break forth, where what Hannah Arendt called the capacity to start something new is a living and enchanting fact, where over and over again the sense that together we can do world changing things is confirmed.²⁴ My point is of course not that seven is a magical number, but rather that the sense of multiple groups working on diverse but related issues has created a fueling intensity in and between the ARTs, on campus, and across the wider community. The densities of these relational webs are crucial to developing the sustaining faith in the possibility that the work they do now and after they graduate can become part of a great social contagion.²⁵

Flexible Structures, Collaborative Culture, Research, Projects: Assessment One Year Out Programmatic/Institutional

One year out I can say without reservation that this pilot project has been wildly successful. Spurred by student enthusiasm and by the strong endorsement of the SUS Fall 2009 Program Review, SUS extended the ART requirement to the second of its three required courses and, at the suggestion of students, has made it an additional lab credit hour. Following the first semester, three additional faculty, excited by the project, added an engaged learning component to their undergraduate courses, feeding their students into the ARTs during the Spring semester.

²³ John Paul Lederach's reflections on web weaving and web watching as key to transformational possibilities in war torn communities have deeply influenced my appreciation for these skills. See *The Moral Imagination*.

²⁴ See "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1954).

²⁵ See Malcolm Gladwell's interesting work on contagious behavior in *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000).

Additionally, although SEED students were not required to continue their ART work after the Fall semester, many have been unwilling to give it up and continue to be actively engaged, increasingly experienced leaders within their ART. At the end of the academic year, the SUS/SEED Project received recognition from the administration in the form of a substantial grant from the President's Innovation Fund. The grant will give graduate assistantships to second year SUS students, now seasoned organizers, who will become the new facilitators for the Action Research Teams.

We are well on our way to establishing the Action Research Teams as permanent flexible structures at NAU and in the community, and we anticipate that others will be created. In addition to the outstanding collaborative leadership and support from the endowed chair of the Program in Community, Culture and Environment, the director of the First Year Seminar Program, and the director of the Master of Arts in Sustainable Communities Program, engaged learning at NAU is being fostered by the newly convened Community of Practice for Engaged Pedagogy and Innovative Transformation (CPEPIT). An initiative of NAU's re-energized Ponderosa Group,²⁶ over two dozen faculty and graduate students from across disciplines and schools gather monthly to study engaged pedagogy, share syllabi, and deepen NAU's collaborative culture. The SUS/SEED project has been a powerful model stimulating and focusing the work of this group in its inaugural year. Building flexible networks across the university, the group is developing an undergraduate certificate on civic engagement that includes sustainability and social justice, and working to amend promotion and tenure criteria to include both interdisciplinary teaching and engaged learning so that faculty are better supported in their efforts to reshape their teaching and research away from discipline-based and toward issue- and problem-based learning.

Student Pathways

The work SUS students are doing in their ARTs has had an immediate and profound impact both on the research agendas for their master's theses and on their *manner* of doing it. Four students in the Public Achievement ART, for example, will be writing directly on the pedagogy of Public Achievement and are currently discussing pioneering a collaborative thesis project. Three students on the Foodlink ART are developing thesis work that comes directly out of and will be useful to the purposes of The Greater Flagstaff Community Food Task Force they successfully organized during the year. One master's student will enter a one-year community organizer training program working in the immigrant community, and seven others will become lead organizers in the expanding ARTs program. Four students, including one undergraduate, will present their work at the AASHE conference in Fall 2010. Masters students have joined the boards of several community organizations while undergraduates, with no prior experience of community organizing, find themselves, after one year, with capacities they now realize many adults do not possess: speaking out at public meetings, doing detailed policy research their team will put to immediate use, doing power analyses and developing relationships of accountability and creative collaborative action on campus and in the wider community. Nearly all students know the transformative joy of collective endeavor. That that joy is contagious we have begun to see from the increasing number of graduate and undergraduate students who, independent of any class requirement, are asking to join one of the ARTs.

²⁶ Over a dozen years ago NAU's Ponderosa Group pioneered an interdisciplinary initiative to green the University curriculum. For the original goals, see <http://www2.nau.edu/~ponder-p/>. In its re-energized form the Ponderosa Group serves as the curricular arm of NAU's energetic Environmental Caucus which brings together faculty, students, staff and administrators from across campus to work collaboratively on issues of sustainability.

Projects/Community Impact

Community organizations have been energized – in some cases doubling their own action committees (F3’s Water Action Committee), and have advanced initiatives at a pace that would never have been possible without the collaborative relationships formed with students (Foodlink’s Community Food Task Force organizing). Moreover, the teams themselves have begun to collaborate together, informing each others’ sense of how to move their visions forward. To give but one example, the Weatherization ART, after collaborating with the City of Flagstaff to make weatherization kits available to low income residents, is working with the Immigration ART to raise money to make kits available to the mobile poor and the undocumented, something regulations prohibit the city from doing. And finally, the ARTs are already being recognized as skilled groups able to take on and fruitfully shape complex projects successfully. One of the more exciting examples here is that both the Sustainability Café-ART and the SSLUG-ART have been asked to collaborate with Campus Food Services to create a new locally and regionally sourced on-campus café and an acre garden. (For more accomplishments see Sidebar).

Sidebar

The ARTs: Tangible Accomplishments

Public Achievement: Students raised \$600 to buy books of their choice for the school library, gathered and donated 200 can goods to the Flagstaff Family Food Center, and spoke powerfully (and successfully) before the school board against ending their school’s year round schedule, and did a food and clothing drive for the community shelter. School culture at Killip Elementary around civic engagement was deepened as teachers increasingly incorporate student initiative into their pedagogy. A second PA project will open at Kinsey Elementary School, building on the successes at Killip.

Weatherization: Formed collaborative relationships with neighborhood associations, the City, the County, for-profit weatherization firms and non-profits, and organized a community event, “Warm the Neighborhood, Cool the Planet” to educate low-income residents about weatherization toolkits. Demonstrated their use by weatherizing the residence of the local nuns. Raised money for a second event: “Warm the Food, Cool the Planet” and weatherized the Flagstaff Family Food Center, a local soup kitchen. Participated in effort to persuade the Arizona Corporation Commission to create a revolving loan fund for weatherization projects across the state. Historic victory.

Northern Arizona Interfaith: Conducted interviews with undocumented residents which will be crafted into powerful organizing tools to educate and advocate for comprehensive immigration reform. As radio spots, they will be aired in the Fall on KNAU and NAU’s KJACK. They will also be used to launch discussions in “civic academies” held in churches and community organizations throughout the area.

F3’s AGWA (Action Group for Water Advocacy): Networked with Food and Water Watch, a national organization, to defeat Nestle and others seeking to bottle Flagstaff’s water for profit. Launched a Take Back the Tap campaign to limit the use of bottled water on campus and increase the number of water refill stations. Participated in successful effort to persuade City of Flagstaff to table a vote on contested use of potable water for snow-making at Snowbowl Ski Resort.

SSLUG: Organized a community seed exchange, two community cold frame workshops, and revived lapsed compost system on campus. Developed strong relationships with staff at campus food services and were asked to take the lead on a new campus garden for the sustainability café.

Flagstaff Foodlink: Held over sixty relational meetings with diverse stakeholders across the Flagstaff food system. Chose thirty and organized and ran the convening meeting of the Greater Flagstaff Community Food Task Force. Three graduates and one undergraduate student on the team will serve on the task force itself.

Sustainability Café: Formed durable collaborative relationships to gain approval and support for a sustainability café in the new Wellness Center. Food will be locally and regionally sourced with fair trade a priority. No bottled water will be served. Students developing policies and deeply engaged in planning.

In Closing

I believe we did much in the first year to reenchant the arts of democracy for ourselves, for students and for the community. The work ahead is to deepen and sustain these structures and the relational culture that gives them life. As I close this piece, the oil continues to gush from the Gulf floor, a violent reminder that we must hear and engage anew the fundamental questions of our lives: *what am I called to do, what is my community called to do, and what are we called to do now?* The pedagogy we pioneered this year gives me hope. It also give me faith that we can continue to expand it as we must, deepening our collective experience of reciprocity with the non human world towards recovering a sense of shared fate and *locating ourselves* on this beautiful earth.



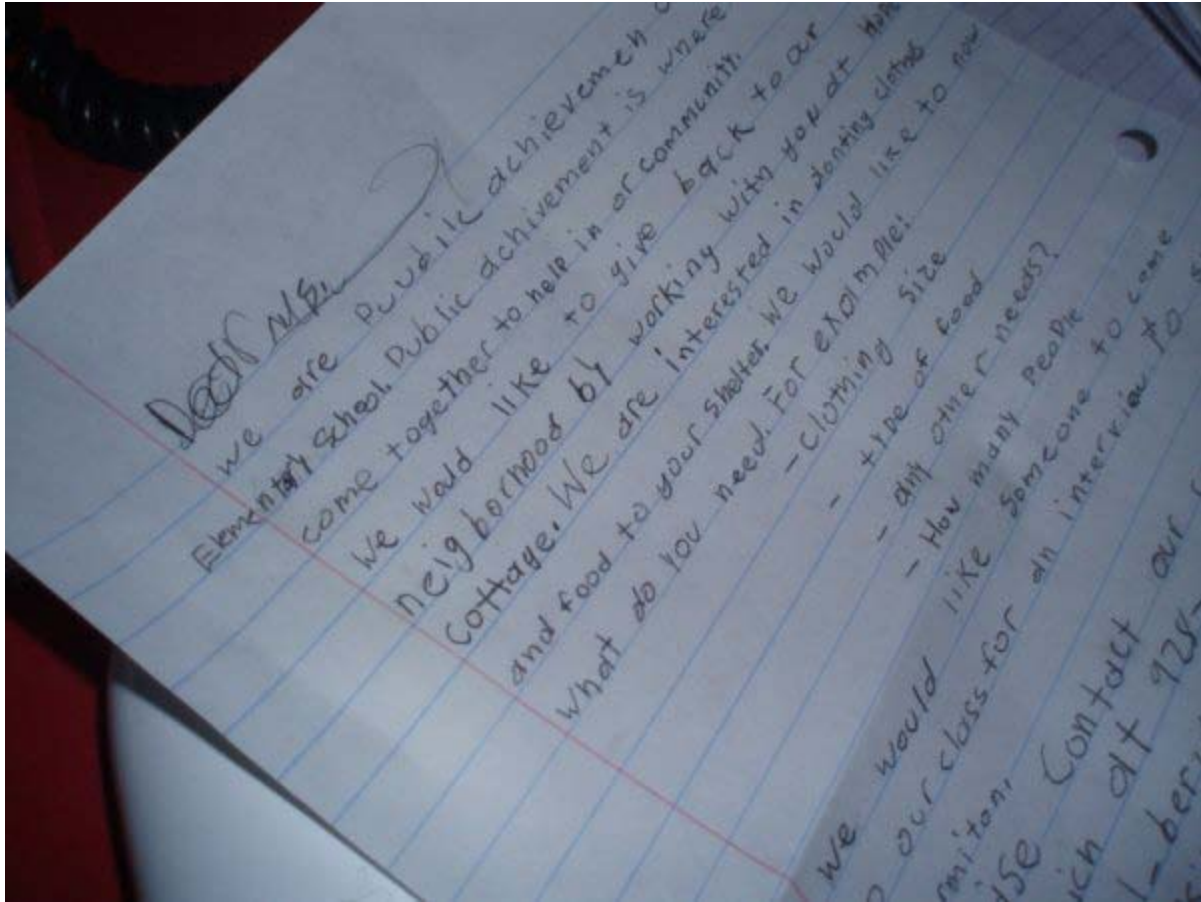
AGWA (Action Group for Water Advocacy): Take Back the Tap Campaign



Cool the Planet, Warm the Neighbors, Community Event: Weatherization of the nun's residence



NAU's Student Garden; SSLUG



Public Achievement: Letter by students to the Shelter



Public Achievement students at Killip Elementary.