Don't Just Do Something, Sit There.

Helping Others Become More Strategic, Conceptual, and Creative: A Cooperative Inquiry

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About this project

In early 2003, as part of a participatory action research designed by the Research and Documentation component of the Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) program at the Research Center for Leadership in Action at NYU, a group of community organizers, along with two facilitators from academia, engaged in a systematic process of cooperative inquiry, exploring a question first proposed by Larry Ferlazzo: "How we can teach people to be more strategic, conceptual, and creative in their thinking?" Cooperative inquiry (CI) is a process of repeated episodes of action and reflection through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of compelling interest to them. We engaged in six cycles of reflection and action.

Our group began forming in late fall of 2002 during an LCW program meeting. The group's members included three LCW awardees: Larry, formerly with the Sacramento Valley Organizing Community; Vicky Kovari, from the Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength; and Reverend Tyrone Hicks, Senior Pastor of Parks Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church; along with two additional participants whom Larry suggested: Mary Ochs, from the Center for Community Change; and Craig McGarvey, an independent consultant. The three awardees are experienced community organizers (Larry changed jobs during the inquiry, accepting a position working with emotionally challenged students in a middle school), as is Mary, who works with community organization facilitators and leaders. Craig is experienced in working with organizers, both as a foundation officer and as a consultant to foundations. The group was facilitated by Lyle Yorks, a member of the faculty of Teachers College, Columbia University, and an experienced CI participant and facilitator, and Lucia Alcántara, a Doctoral Candidate at Teachers College, who is also experienced in CI.

How our inquiry unfolded

After an initial pre-meeting to discuss Larry's proposed question, we met several more times, generally for a day and half. Early in our inquiry process, we invited outsiders to be part of our meetings in order to gain other perspectives on our question. During the latter part of the inquiry, we learned from each other, drawing on the experiences from the actions we were taking.

- At our first full meeting, in August 2003, we spent time getting familiar with one another, thinking about the strategic learning process, sharing stories relevant to our inquiry question, and reflecting on possible implications for our practice.
- During our second and third meetings, we continued sharing stories, talking about our practices, and reflecting on the perspectives provided by invited outsiders.
- By the fourth and fifth meetings, we were taking actions and learning from each other's experiences.
- The sixth, seventh, and eighth meetings focused on making sense of our learning and producing products for sharing this learning with others. This activity deepened our own learning.

The publication that follows was developed from this iterative, CI process. For more information about the Research and Documentation Component of the LCW program and the Research Center for Leadership in Action at NYU, please see the inside back cover. For a more complete report on our inquiry, see www.nyu.edu/wagner/leadership. For more information on conducting a cooperative inquiry, you can refer to J. Bray, J. Lee, L. Smith, & L. Yorks. *Collaborative Inquiry in Practice: Action Reflection and Meaning Making*. Sage Publications, 2000.

Acknowledgements

Contents

We knew we were becoming stale.

"Organizers are always talking about going broader and deeper, and we are missing that—we turn out the numbers at actions, but we are not going broader and deeper. We don't develop people, and if a key person is missing during an event, it's a problem. We need to develop an expanded core of leadership." **–Tyrone Hicks**

Community organizers bring people together to act collectively by exercising their power to develop voice in public decisions affecting their quality of life. Our group (see "About this project" on the inside front cover) came together with a shared sense of concern that organizing actions alone was not enough to sustain our organizations. While we had been effective in achieving many community goals, we also agreed that our leadership core was often not growing, or not growing enough. We knew we were becoming stale. We began exploring the question, "How can we teach people to be more strategic, conceptual, and creative in their thinking?" Larry Ferlazzo, at the time with the Sacramento Valley Organizing Community, proposed this question in the fall of 2002 as part of the Leadership for a Changing World (LCW) program (see inside back cover), and through conversations with each of us, drew us into the inquiry.

In explaining what motivated him to pose the question, Larry shared a conversation he had had some time ago with another organizer who, in discussing some top leaders in the IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation), commented how "one organizer had taught me the skills of organizing, but another had taught me how to think." That insight—the difference between skill and thinking—had stayed with him. Because Larry was weighing the idea of transitioning to teaching, he was in a more reflective space than in years past when he was focused on task. "I was thinking about how I might help students learn to think, which is at the heart of democracy," he said. "This [cooperative inquiry] process might help me to look at the shortcomings in both organizing and teaching. I was really prepared to reflect on how organizers work."

Our conversations and subsequent actions in the inquiry were provocative and educative. They challenged our assumptions about organizing. Early in the inquiry, we were struck by the realization that in our work things seemed out of balance. In the words of Vicky Kovari of Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength, "Organizers can be action junkies, and often avoid deep reflection with others on our actions." As an example, Vicky noted "how stale and rote our evaluations have become, generating the same non-reflective comments over and over again."

We concluded that strategic, conceptual, and creative thinking is developed through processes of inquiry that engage the learner. Importantly, we had to be engaged in the inquiry process itself.

We began to consider a different view of the purpose evaluation serves in our organizations. We came to understand the difference between training people to implement an action and developing their ability to think like creative and strategic leaders. We concluded that strategic, conceptual, and creative thinking is best developed through processes of inquiry that engage the learner. Importantly, we had to be engaged in the inquiry process itself. Only through repeated cycles of action and reflection can people develop their capacity to think creatively, conceptually, and strategically. This is a different approach from the typical skills training that we do in support of our organizing efforts.

Using the tools of inquiry

"Most organizers think that these kinds of reflective tools are at best a luxury and at worst an excuse not to take any action. They are perceived as taking time away from the real business of organizing, which is planning actions."—Vicky Kovari

What follows are snapshots that illustrate how we developed our insights around facilitating strategic, conceptual, and creative thinking, and in some cases, put them into practice. We began to experiment with various adult education tools and practices such as storytelling, "the learning window," and using metaphors in working with our organizations. Our purpose throughout was to share our learning and provoke further debate and dialogue about the connections between inquiry, education, and organizing. We did this through a series of reflective stories.

A chorus of no's

In 2004 the Center for Community Change (CCC), a national organization providing support to local community groups in order to strengthen the field of organizing, convened its first training of national leaders from around the country for a voter registration campaign focused on the presidential elections. Mary Ochs, CCC's National Field Director, wanted to use storytelling as an icebreaker at the campaign's initial gathering. When Mary consulted with her colleagues about the use of storytelling, she met with a chorus of resistance.

I said I was going to ask people to tell a story about their personal history or their family's history with voting. My colleagues said no, no, nobody will have anything to say. We have too much to do. It will take too long. I decided to try it anyway.

I was sweating it. The first story was from a young woman named Amber, who said, "I voted for the first time in the 2000 presidential election. Later that evening, while watching the election returns on the news, I realized in a very real way how important every vote is. The presidential race in my state [New Mexico] was very close. As I watched the news, I saw the color coding from New Mexico changing back and forth from red to blue, blue to red every few minutes as new returns came in. The presidential election was so close in New Mexico and many other states. I am now telling this story to people that I register to vote."

All of the stories were absolutely amazing. Everyone saw the point of the exercise. Their stories grounded us, not only in what we were going to talk about, but also at the deeper purpose. Collectively, the stories were a microcosm of the types of values, experiences, and barriers we would encounter when doing voter work. By putting out stories, we also learned something about each person. You could feel a different sense in the room after we did it—a shared sense of purpose and shared fate.

As we later discussed Mary's action, Vicky expressed her own initial resistance to using stories. "What I learned from reflecting on the role of stories," she said, "was that, before this process, I never really understood the power of stories as a learning tool. I would have been right there in that chorus of no's."

Using Stories

Stories are a powerful way of communicating knowledge. They can also be instrumental in getting people to look at issues in new ways. Telling stories engages reflective processes in both the person telling the story and in the listeners. Our group's experience with stories and their power got us into a discussion of what a powerful learning strategy stories are. Returning to our question of how we teach people, we came to realize a contradiction in our original question: the difference between training (where people are just given information, or taught how to do something such as how to register voters) vs. facilitating learning (engaging people to reflect and gain insight from their own and others' experiences). Repeatedly, we found that we were most effective in generating strategic and creative thinking in others when we were venturing onto new ground, experimenting, and trying something new ourselves.

When using stories, it is important to:
- Frame the activity in a way that is relevant to the task at hand and provides for new perspectives;
- Not just share experiences, but help people make connections between different experiences and suggest new approaches;
- Spend time asking probing questions to explore insights gained by both the storyteller and the listeners;
- Maintain a balance between group process and stories in the process of discovery.

Just tell 'em, "It's one."

For eighteen years, Larry Ferlazzo had been an organizer, most recently with the Sacramento Valley Organizing Community. During our inquiry, Larry was transitioning from organizing to teaching. We noticed how he was most effective in helping his students be conceptual or creative when he was intentional about creating a new experience, rather than using a prior lesson plan. For example, during his first year of teaching he was doing a unit on density and buoyancy. Larry tells the story:

> *I decided that a good experiment would be to have the students first determine the density of pieces of wood that were the same in every way except that they would be cut in different lengths. I would then have them determine the density of water through a similar experiment, and then, through the experience of placing the wood in water, they could conclude that objects with less density than water would float. They would do these experiments while working in small groups. Having described what I was doing to some experienced teachers, they all told me, "You are wasting your time. Just tell them the density of water is one." I did it anyway, and the experiment went great.*

"As organizers, we are often like these experienced teachers," Larry said. "We feel so task oriented that we don't take the time to help people learn. We already know exactly how to do the next step, so we train people to do it, rather than creating a 'lesson plan' that helps them to discover how to do it."

Do I know what I think I know?

Vicky Kovari is a lead organizer for MOSES (Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength) in Detroit. For two years MOSES had been in a campaign advocating for regional mass transit. The campaign was stuck and needed new direction. Vicky used a technique called the learning window (see sidebar), which we had discussed at a CI meeting. Reflecting on where to take the campaign, Vicky first asked herself and then her group of leaders to answer three questions: "What do you know you know?" "What do you think you know?" and "What do you know you don't know?"

In trying to answer these questions, she realized that much of the group's process and many of its tactics were based on what they really didn't know. Somehow they had to find strategies that were based on what they actually experienced or knew from talking to people and on data from studies, etc. The group also needed to be more explicit about what risks it was going to take, based on what the members only thought they knew. For example, much of the group's past actions were directed toward the state legislature, which was very hostile to the group and to Detroit in particular. As Vicky tells the story:

We were making certain, invalid assumptions about those legislators, or we were in denial. We just kept thinking we needed to go back to them. Everything we knew about the current legislators meant that going back to the legislature didn't make sense for us—we were not going to win. So we looked at who had at least as much power in the region as legislators and began to look to the courts. We also realized that if we were ever to be successful in getting the public or the legislature to increase funding for public transit, we had to dramatically change the current system, especially in Detroit. The public would not fund a dysfunctional system. So we decided to use the courts as a way to create a bigger crisis within the system and expose the dysfunction of the current transit system with the hope of getting a receiver appointed. We filed a lawsuit against the City of Detroit to take management of the system away from the city. This was a risky move, and like everything else in Detroit, fraught with racial land mines. For a very diverse group of leaders, however, it became clear that we needed to take a new strategic approach, and this one made the most sense.

Many of the initial campaign's tactics had been based on what they didn't know. Talking through their approach with the learning window, her group came to see that they were basing actions on what they only thought they knew (untested beliefs), rather than what their experience had taught them. After using the learning window, it became clear that the group needed to take a new strategic approach.

The Learning Window

The difference between "What We Know" and "What We Think We Know" is the extent to which facts (from studies, direct experiences, and so forth) support the group's belief. Their willingness to engage in robust testing of their ideas and strategies against facts and experience is at the heart of sound strategic thinking. This process often surfaces additional unknowns that are brought into the strategy.

What We Know	What We Think We Know
What We Know We Don't Know	?

Figure 1: Based on T.A. Stewart, *Intellectual Capital: The New Wealth of Organizations*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1997

Creating tomorrow's headlines today

At midpoint in the inquiry process, we began thinking about new ways to facilitate learning. Mary shared a story from another training event later in the 2004 voter registration campaign (see page 5). Because the storytelling exercise had been well received at the earlier training, she was asked to create another icebreaker. It was suggested by a colleague that she have participants say what they want to get out of the training. Mary wanted to use the icebreaker as a learning exercise:

I wanted the participants at this particular training to think strategically about why they were doing voter work, what their goals were, and what they wanted to get out of it. The way that I wanted them to reflect on this was to imagine that they were writing a news article the day after the election, and their voter work got noticed by the powers that be and the press. What would the headline be and what would some of the comments from their leaders and decision makers from the community be in the news article?

I contacted all of the organizations by phone a few days before the training to give them time to think about the assignment. I had some reluctant participants, but they all showed up with something. Upon arriving at the meeting, I handed out butcher paper to the attendees and asked them to write the headline and some of the points to be covered in the story. This technique got the attending organizers to think longer term and strategically and not just about what impact their efforts might have on the outcome of the 2004 presidential elections. What did it mean for their organizations? What's the message they wanted the public, their leaders, and decision makers to see?

It's exactly what I was trying to get people to think about: What did this mean in terms of message and positioning if you were going to write the article the next day?

The exercise also worked as a way for the participants to get to know each other's organizations as well as frame concepts for development throughout the training. Some participants said they would use this idea in their home organizations to further their conversation about goals and strategy.

"Remember the wood chips"

In our struggle to understand what constitutes strategic, conceptual, and creative thinking, we explored the use of metaphors. Larry's story of the "wood chips" helped us think more creatively about the power of metaphors.

I told this story to a group to get them to think about not rushing into actions, to think about how they were going to sustain their organization. I used to live in a house on a slight down slope. Every time it rained, the wood chips would wash away. My wife would ask me to plant grass, but I would just go out and get more wood chips, and before long, they would wash away again. Finally, I planted grass and didn't have to keep going out to buy wood chips. Members of the organization tell me that whenever someone is pushing to move too fast, someone [else] says, "Remember the wood chips."

Mary recalled this story about metaphors during a meeting with her recently reorganized staff to deal with the challenge of getting the diverse groups to conceptualize ways of working together.

We need staff members who are nimble and versatile. I was asking our policy staff, our organizers, and our organization development specialists to learn more about each other's practice, to get out of their comfort zones. There was a sense of angst in the room. We had just gone through a major reorganization. I could read their faces—what is she talking about, what does this mean? Then one of our staff spoke up. "Let's think of it as though we are declaring our majors and minors in college. We don't just learn one specialty—there's a relationship in our practice between our major and our minor." I jumped on this. I recalled the discussion of metaphors we had in our CI group. "I think this is a really helpful metaphor," I said. I could tell that people were clear on what we needed to do. It placed the concept within their experience. I didn't consciously use metaphors until then.

Using Metaphors

People use metaphors all time. Many of these metaphors are expressions of our culture. They also give insight into the personal world views of people. Creatively used metaphors can help people look at a situation differently, opening up their frames of reference in a way that helps them see new possibilities. The story Mary tells in the accompanying text is a good example of this.

Here are some ways to use metaphors:
- Call attention to metaphors when they are expressed and reflect on the implications, such as what they suggest about assumptions people are holding;
- Invite people to brainstorm metaphors for a particular situation with which a group is struggling; and
- Use metaphors that speak from broad experiences common to the group, helping people become connected to the point being made.

Metaphors can lead to new conceptualization. For example, we often referred to the "space" created in our busy lives by getting together, which became a way of thinking about what was missing in our work with others in our organizations.

We decided to use metaphors ourselves to help better understand the abstract concepts of strategic, conceptual, and creative thinking. At the time there was considerable discussion in the press about how the intelligence community had failed to connect the dots. Consequently, what emerged was the metaphor of dots. Each dot represented a different stakeholder. Strategic thinking required connecting the dots in ways that would create new perspectives for looking at a strategic challenge. The "connect-the-dots" metaphor was utilized as a vehicle to further our interpretation of what strategic, creative, critical, and conceptual thinking would look like.

- **Creative:** What should the dots look like and how many different ways can they be arranged or rearranged?
- **Conceptual:** What is the meaning of dots? How can they be best connected?
- **Critical:** Why do we need dots and should they be connected?
- **Strategic:** How do these dots relate to where future dots may go? Where might other dots be now?

This exercise demonstrated the interdependence of these concepts. Creative, conceptual, critical, and strategic thinking are not synonymous with one another. One can be creative and conceptual, and not strategic. However, effective strategic thinking is both creative and conceptual. Furthermore, the dots are metaphors for people, organizations, institutions, and policies in the strategic political terrain.

Creating space for learning

The further we got into our inquiry process, the clearer it became that we needed to create a better learning environment in our organizations. We already have the action environment, and that's important; without action there is nothing to learn from. However, we need to create the space for learning and to model it. In the past, we have often given lip service to the idea of reflection. We were always focused on the next action, the need for dues, or some other task. Our cooperative inquiry created such a space for learning. Reflecting on the experience of participating in our CI, Larry noted, "This process has clearly helped to push me to think more intentionally about how people learn to think."

Prior to our group, Larry had conversations about the work of Hanna Arendt, a German philosopher and survivor of the Holocaust, with Larry Gordon, a well-known national trainer of community organizers. The importance of bringing people into public life and collective action, and the creation of the space to do critical thinking is what organizing is all about. At Larry Ferlazzo's suggestion, Larry Gordon visited one of our meetings and spoke with us about Arendt's insights into critical thinking.

Vicky remembers, "At the start of Gordon's presentation I was afraid it was just going to be an academic exercise. Then I asked myself the question, 'What does this mean in my own organization?' The distinction between politics with subjective citizens versus ideology with people who are seen as objectified consumers is very powerful. People always say to us organizers, 'Tell me what to do', and we say, 'Do this.' We do all the strategic and creative thinking and wonder why they aren't thinking strategically."

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Tyrone experimented with shaking things up to create this kind of space by doing a worship service backward one Sunday, starting with the benediction. While this initially created some confusion, many in the congregation realized how routine and habitual their worship practice had become. New conversations about the meaning of faith and action were created. In thinking about this experience, Tyrone later said, "The reaction of the people was mixed on doing the church service backward. The majority saw it as refreshing and a move from the traditional. I don't know if the reaction would have been the same if I had warned them in advance. It is the same as having a script and just following the script without any creativity or spontaneous action. Some of the best moments are when we allow the creative juice to grab us. Some of the greatest learning and teaching moments come when we have 'aha' moments that cause us to examine more closely why we are doing what we do. They also create space for moments of reflection. We are not clear about creating space to encourage this kind of thinking. What is missing is taking the time to create the space and involving ourselves in it."

We have come to see this as the difference between dealing with people as subjects versus treating them as objects in our training, recognizing that critical, strategic thinking is what happens between us. We have also continued to recognize the need for balance. Listening to each other's expertise is valuable when people are engaging in inquiry. This is why Larry Gordon's presentation was so powerful for us. It was in the context of an active process of inquiry. We were not just "objects" listening to a required lecture, but were engaged as learners.

Lead by learning

In November 2003, three grassroots, interfaith organizations in Michigan came together for a leadership retreat. Vicky reflected on how she had tried to share her new insights into strategic thinking during the retreat.

At the end of the retreat, I did a PowerPoint piece on strategic thinking, using a lot of what we had discussed at our cooperative inquiry meetings. I had a screen on how adults learn through experience; about the loops of the action-reflection cycle; about what reflection is, why it is important, and the dangerous and pernicious consequences of failing to reflect on one's own actions and what is going on in the world; and about the importance of stories and metaphors. I challenged folks to begin a more intentional process of reflection and asked 15 of them to keep a journal over the next year of their work in their organizations. It was the best I could do at the time, but now I wonder, what was I thinking? I was giving a lecture about learning through experience!

Vicky's realization was shared by the rest of the CI group and represented a gradual but profound shift in our assumptions about developing leaders for our organizations. We had originally asked how we could teach people to be more strategic, creative, and conceptual. What we began to understand was the importance of engaging others in the experience of strategic thinking. Our own actions and relationships with them would be part of the equation. To help people learn to be more strategic, creative, and conceptual, we would have to be intentional about being more strategic, creative, and conceptual in our relationship with them. Larry described it as "learning while helping others to learn. You can only teach these things when you are doing them yourself. You can only teach when you are trying to learn. It is about positioning yourself within the process as a lead learner. It's an orientation rather than a methodology."

A "lead learner," we recognized, would ask different questions: How do I learn to become more intentional about being strategic, creative, and conceptual in my thinking? How do I behave? What experiences do I help to shape for people in the community so that they can learn through those experiences? Many of the actions taken during our inquiry represented the experiments of organizers who were becoming conscious of themselves as lead learners:

We can only sustain positive community change if we are intentional about what people are learning. Both the specific community impact of the action and the learning process of the community actors are important. For true change to happen, one cannot exist without the other.

• Tyrone conducting a church service backward;
• Vicky encouraging the use of journals;
• Mary asking get-out-the-vote volunteers to write the headline they would want to see in the paper the day after the election;
• Larry guiding his students through a discovery of the density of water;
• Our group's exploration into the power of story to connect deeply with people's personal experiences and the power of metaphor to broaden those experiences to a universal level.

Being intentional about learning required us to be thinking about the cycles of the learning experience. We dug deeper, taking responsibility to identify and challenge unspoken assumptions. A big related assumption was generated as we came to these realizations. Craig put it this way: "We can only sustain positive community change if we are intentional about what people are learning. Both the specific community impact of the action and the learning process of the community actors are important. For true change to happen, one cannot exist without the other."

This was another way of talking about the balance between action and reflection in organizing work, exactly where the group had started its inquiry. But it represented a clear, collective recognition that our work was way out of balance. Tyrone talked about the importance of getting people to work without a script: "We went into a meeting with the Mayor. We knew what the outcome should be, what we were trying to accomplish, who was going to do what, but no scripts. People had to think about what they were going to say. It is a question of balance, not a question of being unprepared." Reflecting on Tyrone's story, Mary agreed. It is important for leaders to be well prepared. Scripts have their place as a tool to help leaders think about what could happen. But scripts can also be used as a crutch for leaders not to have to think.

"We went into a meeting with the Mayor. We knew what the outcome should be, what we were trying to accomplish, who was going to do what, but no scripts. People had to think about what they were going to say. It is a question of balance, not a question of being unprepared."

Much earlier, at the first CI meeting, a visiting speaker, a lead trainer in a national organizing network, made a provocative statement: We teach people how to act more courageously in the public arena, but we ask them to let us do the thinking. That statement captured in some part what was troubling inquiry participants at the outset—what had motivated them to join the CI process. "I am trying not to use the 'training' word anymore," said Mary. "It is how I can get them to learn these things, not how I can train these things into them."

The cooperative inquiry process that had enabled these personal transformations, we recognized, was itself a metaphor for the realizations we had reached. The process had walked its talk. The action and reflection cycles of our inquiry were learning cycles; we were encouraged to reflect on our actions, then based on these reflections, to go out and try new actions of our choice, and finally to come back and reflect further. Academic theories helped us put what we were learning in a broader perspective, but these constructs were always brought in following experience to help us deepen our discussion, never "taught" from the top down.

Doing Cooperative Inquiry in a Community Organization

The following were important characteristics of our inquiry process:

- Having a compelling question that participants are hungry to answer;
- Having a desire for inquiring into the question with the other participants;
- Realizing that there are no quick or guaranteed answers, but having faith that something valuable will come out the process of inquiring with this group of people;
- Accessing experienced facilitation;
- Understanding that the process is organic and unfolds; the process can't be scripted—getting in the muck is important;
- Taking action and learning from experience;
- Recognizing the value in diversity of practice; and
- Developing a product deepened the exercise and crystallized the learning.

Continuing the Learning in Our Practice

"I am much more reflective than I used to be but have not lost my sense of urgency to act. Creating these learning conditions is an ongoing struggle. At least now we recognize the shortcomings of what we do and are struggling with them."—Vicky Kovari

 "Without the experience of the cooperative inquiry," says Vicky, "I do not think I would have been as aware and appreciative of how adults learn. I have come to appreciate the power of stories and metaphors as learning tools. I also am more aware of the importance of creating the space and the permission for people in an organization not only to think about the lessons they learned from their actions, but also what this suggests about how they need to act in the future. There is a risk in creating this space in that it can become an excuse not to act boldly. Balance–in terms of reflection and action–is key. These realizations have changed my leadership in profound ways. For example, at the beginning of campaigns we always do a power analysis. Now I am much more rigorously aware of the difference between 'what we know' and 'what we think we know.' In power analysis, the lines between these two levels of knowing get blurred all the time. When doing evaluations, I ask people, 'What did you learn?' You can see that meetings have failed when people can't identify what they learned. That's a wake-up call.

"There are implications about inquiry in how we start campaigns. We need to be getting people together to inquire into the nature of the strategic issues before we begin plans for taking action."

Mary continues to use these methods in her organizing work. In addition, she has begun the process of creating opportunities for her staff and some other organizers to engage in a CI process around a compelling question that they create. For example, she has budgeted a modest amount of money for a group of her staff and other organizers to explore the initial questions, "What are some of the best examples of organizing that move rural constituencies to achieve change? What kind of organizing pulls rural people who have been lost to us back to progressive organizing?"

Articulating a Vision of Our Values

The organizing community has been struck by the success the political right has had in creating a vision of their values. We want to engage in an inquiry process that will help articulate a vision of our values and not just leave this work to academic think tanks. We think it is important that our staff, board members, and members of the community be active participants in this process. Utilizing a CI process is one way of creating space for advancing the work of two groups we have initiated to engage in this inquiry.

As a result of the CI, Larry and Craig wrote an article on the relationship between classroom teaching and community organizing. Arranged as a dialogue and meant to create further dialogue, the paper draws upon Larry's experiences (as a former organizer and recently a teacher) and Craig's (as a former teacher and recently a foundation program officer and consultant working with organizers). It can be found in the Summer 2005 issue of the journal *Social Policy*.

Evaluation as CI

In his consulting practice, Craig is incorporating ideas from the CI to help foundations and community organizations use formal evaluations as authentic learning experiences. He's encouraging organizations, when asked by foundations to do evaluations, to take ownership and control of the process, to use evaluation to crack the biggest nuts they want to crack, and to learn the things they want to learn. He's also encouraging foundations to learn along with the organizations they are funding.

One group that is being funded to help various communities create Civic Engagement (CE) days, which draw residents into public activity, is treating each day as a "laboratory" to test strategies. Reflection between each of the CE days is used to improve the next CE day.

Another organization is trying to create a day-to-day "case-study mentality" in its evaluation. That means finding ways to capture and record, in real time, the decisions they are making, the mistakes they are realizing, the "ahas" they are having. They're trying to tell their story to themselves as they live their story, so that when the body of work is finished, they've captured the case study of the work. They can then use the case for training, for documentation, for convincing others (their funder!) that they are accomplishing something now, and that they will do even better next time. One tactic they've used to capture information is an e-mail-exchange stream—anybody, at any time, can hit "reply to all" on the e-mail, add a thought, and click "send."

> ### *In organizing, we say we do reflection on action, but it is not deep enough and is limited to a narrow set of activities.*

Although the evaluations are not formal cooperative inquiries, all of them take a "collaborative inquiry" approach. Questions are jointly created and collectively pursued. Everybody—the funders and the community organizations, the research consultants, and the practitioners—are co-inquirers.

Teaching Strategic Thinking in the Classroom

Larry is now teaching recent immigrants English at Sacramento's largest inner-city high school.

> *Most of my time is spent with pre-literate Hmong refugees. It's an opportunity of a lifetime—how often will a high school teacher have a classroom filled with students who have never been in school before? Many of my organizing skills and inquiry group reflections have been critical in my becoming a successful teacher. In addition to teaching the Hmong newcomers, I've also been teaching more intermediate English language learners.*
>
> *I'm more aware of helping students to think strategically. Often times, schools focus on trying to teach skills (identify the setting) instead of teaching*

strategies. (How do you identify the setting of what you are reading? What clues are in the text? How can asking questions and making connections with your prior knowledge help you identify the setting and assist you to gain a deeper understanding in general of what you are reading, and how do you do that? Does knowing the setting add to the piece in some way? Does it really even matter to know the setting?) I've heard the difference between skills and strategies talked about in this way: Skills are what you do when you take out your key and open the door. Strategies are what you do when you lose your key.

I'm more aware of helping students to think conceptually. Good teaching, I believe, is more about working inductively, from the specific to the general, rather than deductively, from the general to the specific. You are guiding the experience. You can give the students a "data set" to work with. For example, I picked the items they were experimenting with in the water to help them identify what would float and what would not (see the density story p.6). But then, within that data set, you get the students to explore and come to their own understanding of the ideas, rather than lecturing them about the general case that somebody else figured out. It's about "enactment" rather than "reenactment."

I'm more aware of helping students to think creatively. One day we were studying ancient cultures and their technologies. The Ancient Greeks kept time with water and two cups. I didn't tell my students how the Greeks did it or even that they did it. I gave them two plastic cups and water and said, "Do you think you could tell time with these?" During this school year, it's safe to say that just about every day has been a "good day." Teaching with a focus on helping students to learn to think more strategically, conceptually, and creatively, I believe, has played a big role in having those good days.

A Matter of Balance

Maintaining a balance between action and reflection is critical for developing and sustaining leadership in our organizations. In organizing, we say we do reflection on action, but it is not deep enough and is limited to a narrow set of activities. Much of it is limited to looking at the actions themselves. We need to go deeper, using stories, metaphors, and other methods to stimulate new ways of thinking. To help people learn to lead, you have to be learning with them. You need to create a space where this learning can take place. All of the ideas that grew from the inquiry itself were exhibited by the inquirers. We were "co-creators" and "co-conspirers." We "enacted" rather than "reenacted." We told stories and turned them into metaphors. Unscripted, we made maps, rather than being handed maps to follow.

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